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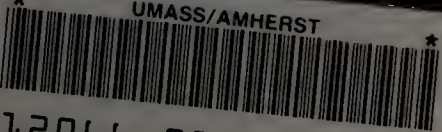
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FIVE COLLEGE DEPOSITORY

AN ANALYSIS OF YOUTH EMPOWERMENT
THROUGH GROUP INVOLVEMENT

A Dissertation Presented

by

ANDREA "ANGE" DIBENEDETTO

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

February 1991

Education

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AN ANALYSIS OF YOUTH EMPOWERMENT
THROUGH GROUP INVOLVEMENT

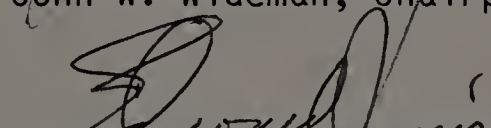
A Dissertation Presented


by


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Dedicated to Seth Kreisberg,
who truly lived the meaning of empowerment.
&
To my mother, Gloria,
who taught me to stand up for what I know is
true.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To all who care and believe in the empowerment of others-- especially the young people of the world.

My deepest appreciation to Jack Wideman. He loved, supported and gently guided me through this process. His belief in my work sustained me. Thank you.

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Many thanks to my family of origin, for the strength created by our Italian working class family. You taught me to persist in the struggle for success. To my father Michael, to Teri, Nicky, Marie, Paul, Tony, Joelle, Tom, and Libby.

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Above all, I thank you Jim Johnson, my partner, for your unbelievable patience, emotional support and unconditional love. You are a gift and I could not have done it without you.

And to the Goddess...

ABSTRACT

AN ANALYSIS OF YOUTH EMPOWERMENT
THROUGH GROUP INVOLVEMENT

FEBRUARY 1991

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The intent of this study was to explore directly from the statements of youth themselves how teens experience youth empowerment through participation in youth groups. This study was based upon an analysis of youth as a group oppressed by adultism. Empowerment is the essential process by which this oppression is overcome. Through the personal accounts of a sample of eight youths who belong to six diverse organizations, a deeper understanding has been developed of what are the essential ingredients for the empowerment of youth.

The study used qualitative research methods to explore in depth the experience of youth through interviews conducted by the researcher. A methodology which encouraged youth to reflect and enter into a dialogue was selected to be consistent with the empowerment process. The analysis of the data was completed in two sections. The first section consists of participants' profiles which

summarized personal stories prior to group involvement and significant experiences with the group that lead to the youths' empowerment.

In the second section an inductive analysis of the data was made to discover emerging themes in the youths' experience of the empowerment process. This research concludes that incorporating three components in a youth empowerment model--emotional nurturance, intellectual challenge, shared power with adults--results in a successful formula for the transformation from disempowerment to empowerment. The empowerment organization provides emotional nurturance, consisting of safety, closeness and appreciation, expression of emotions, conflict resolution and the acceptance of diversity. Such emotional nurturance lays a strong foundation and creates a positive organizational climate. In this climate, intellectual challenge is developed: youth receive sophisticated training and education which builds critical analysis and fosters the development of their voice. Through this combination of intellectual and emotional growth, many aspects of the youth developed individually and as group members. Emotional nurturance and intellectual challenge are set in a context of shared power which includes a non-authoritarian relationship with an adult leader. Youth have the opportunity to experience and exercise power which helps them to choose where and how to take action. This results in increased self esteem and empowerment.

PREFACE

I always felt out of place,
but a magic moment came along,
and I felt like I belonged somewhere.
THE SOURCE was that MAGIC.
IT SAVED MY LIFE.
Andy Mckenny member of THE SOURCE

I knew Andy Mckenny as a member of THE SOURCE 1980-1984. THE SOURCE was a youth program which I developed and implemented during that time. Working with THE SOURCE was indeed a magical time. The teen-agers and I created a multi-faceted program in an atmosphere of love and caring that influenced each of us. We lacked the terms to define it but essentially we ran an empowerment program.

In retrospect my work at THE SOURCE motivated me to pursue my graduate studies and to write this dissertation. Through this research I have arrived at the understanding of what we did at THE SOURCE and how we did it.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Many young people experience the pain and frustration of feelings of disempowerment. These feelings can develop for many reasons. Adult society tends not to take young people seriously. These patronizing attitudes are then internalized by youth and manifested in a lack of trust and confidence. This is called adultism.

Furthermore, not only do rigid laws like mandatory schooling and child labor laws tend to further discount the individuality of young people, but youth are not even accorded the dignity of being recognized as an oppressed group in our society. These oppressive patterns, adultism, often lead to behaviors destructive both to self and to society. In recent years attempts have been made to counter youth disempowerment through the creation of youth empowerment programs. This study will explore the experience of young people involved in such programs.

Disempowerment occurs on several levels--personal, interpersonal, and societal. I will examine how teens move from a position of oppression to one of empowerment by participating in programs like the Children of War and the Youth Action Program. These are examples of programs that have successfully addressed problems of youth disempowerment (a brief description of these programs is found in Chapter IV).

For the purpose of this dissertation I will use the following definition of empowerment: empowerment is personal change and growth that results in a more confident, articulate, and socially active individual. This definition is derived from the work of the Brazilian educator and theorist Paulo Freire, who states that "at no time can there be a struggle for liberation and self-affirmation without the formation of an identity, an identity of the individual, the group, the social class" (Freire, 1985, p. 186). This identity develops on three levels: personal, interpersonal, and societal. Empowerment occurs when individuals become more in touch with their feelings, their intellect, their capacities, their personal pride and voice. The interpersonal component occurs through relationships with peers and adults. Janet Surrey believes that,

personal empowerment can be viewed only through the larger lens of power through connection, i.e., through the establishment of mutually empathic and mutually empowering relationships. Thus, personal empowerment and the relational context through which this emerges must always be considered simultaneously (Surrey, 1987, p. 3).

When their relationships with peers and adults result in support, trust, intimacy and better communication, teens develop a model upon which to base future relationships. When these relationships occur within the context of a constructive group, the teens are better able to present themselves more assertively in the adult world. Personal change and growth, fostered through experiences in a group, can lead to more public, visible ways of exercising power.

On a societal level, teens can counteract oppressive definitions of themselves by taking positive leadership roles, speaking out about social injustices, and acting not just for themselves but for a larger community. Working in concert with a group on social justice issues not only reinforces their personal and interpersonal communication skills but also helps give them an identity so they can work towards liberation and empowerment. Some characteristics that young people show when fully empowered include: feeling good about themselves, taking responsibility, becoming critical thinkers, developing a sense of personal power, becoming productive, acquiring a voice regarding decisions that affect them, initiating support, developing strong positive relationships, belonging to a group, addressing their feeling and emotions, and helping to foster change in the world (DiBenedetto, 1987; Freire, 1973; Jackins, 1980; Rogers, 1980).

Background of the Problem

The major cause of disempowerment is societal oppression. Oppression is defined by Paulo Freire as being,

any state or situation where an individual or group objectifies and exploits, by making decisions for the other, prescribing another's consciousness and perception, and hindering the pursuit of self-affirmation as a responsible person...such a situation itself constitutes violence, even when sweetened by false generosity, because it interferes with man's ontological and historical vocation to be more fully human (Freire, 1972, p. 40).

Another definition of oppression based on the philosophy of Re-evaluation Counseling is,

the systematic mistreatment of the members of one group of people by the society, often with another group or groups acting as the agents of the oppression. This mistreatment is one-way. Young people are oppressed by the society with adults acting as the agents of the oppression. This is part of the structure of our economy. It permeates schools, mental health systems, religions, political structures, families, media, etc. (Hyatt, 1988, p. 37).

The two primary manifestations of oppression that affect young people are ageism and adultism. These forms of oppression manifest themselves in institutions like schools, the family, the labor force and the legal system. Institutionalized oppression, specifically in the family and the school system, will be examined in the literature review section. All teens experience ageism and adultism but they experience them differently based on other social identities: race, gender, sexual orientation, class, disabilities, and religion. My study will take these different experiences of ageism and adultism into account, but racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, ableism, and anti-semitism will not be fully reviewed in this summary.

The result on young people of these two forms of oppression is a narrowing of their world view, a feeling of powerlessness, a lack of concern for themselves or their peers, and an alienation from issues of social justice (Jackins, 1974; Whitham, 1982). For young people disempowerment is the lack of power and control over significant decisions that affect their lives. Teens often aren't treated with respect, listened to, or taken seriously. Many adults don't want to

give teens rights, responsibilities, or a voice, and they are not honest with teens about issues that directly effect teens' lives. Freire states that "the oppressed live in a culture of silence, unable to name their own reality and are forced to live under the "prescription" of the oppressor" (Jackson, 1986, p. 5). Because teen-agers are silenced, negatively stereotyped, and prohibited from political decision-making they internalize and perpetuate cycles of oppression. This alienation manifests itself in increasing rates of teen suicide, pregnancy, poverty, drug abuse, and crime. These problems are caused in part by society's confirmation of teens' self-hatred and a lack of resources for teen empowerment. In addition to young people's experiences of oppression and disempowerment in our society, it is also to critical recognize the disempowerment of adult youth leaders and the impact of this on programs developed to empower and serve our youth. If the people who are committed to helping our young people are marginalized by being poorly paid, lacking community and organizational support, and most importantly are not trained in youth oppression theory, then they do not have the skills or information to help interrupt the disempowerment/oppression in young people's experience.

Statement of the Problem

We know a great deal about the intentions of the people who plan and design youth programs, but we know little or nothing about the learning experiences of the youth engaged in these programs. How have teens experienced youth programs, and what impact have these

programs had on their lives? How do teens actually move from a position of oppression to one of empowerment? There is very little research documenting teen oppression. In fact, because Americans are loathe to view their society through the lens of power dynamics teens are not generally viewed as an oppressed group at all. Thus, their empowerment has not been documented even though significant work has been done on other groups' empowerment. Therefore the problem addressed in this study is the lack of information on how socially oppressed teen-agers can gain empowerment and become aware, active members of their community.

Purpose of the Study

This study gathers detailed information about how young people actually become empowered by participating in youth groups that are based on youth oppression theory. This information can be used in advising other youth workers about specific criteria needed to develop the most effective empowerment programs for youth. In addition, this study can be used to develop training workshops for youth leaders on youth oppression theory. Furthermore it will add the experience of youth to current theoretical work on empowerment.

Significance of the Study

This study provides direct information about how teens experience youth empowerment. Although there are hundreds of youth-serving programs across the nation, the majority of programs have a philosophy and level of intervention that treats only the symptoms of youth disempowerment and that frequently perpetrate disempowerment

through adultism and ageism. This study provides information about how teens become empowered through programs that acknowledge systemic oppression, offering a better understanding about the ways to develop more effective youth programs that directly meet the deeper needs of our youth living in an oppressive society.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present a theoretical understanding of youth oppression and the process by which youth move from a place of powerlessness to one of empowerment. This chapter will be divided into three sections. The first section will present a review of oppression theory and provide a framework for understanding youth disempowerment. The second section will cover the following three components: the historical overview on adolescence as a social invention; the literature that looks at youth's specific experience of oppression; adultism, ageism, and the manifestation of oppression in the family and school system, and how adolescent development theory views adolescent disempowerment as primarily developmental and psycho-social rather than socio-political. The third section will review empowerment literature, providing criteria which may be applicable to youth, and the limited literature on youth empowerment.

Overview of Theories of Oppression

To be able to understand youth oppression we must first understand the concept of oppression in general. The literature on oppression theory clearly defines oppression as the systemic subjugation of one social group by another social group. This subjugation occurs on institutional, cultural and individual levels.

Hardiman and Jackson explain that systemic oppression "is not merely an ideology or set of beliefs (prejudices)...nor is it random or isolated acts of discrimination or harassment" (Jackson & Hardiman, 1986, p. 1). Oppression for Hardiman and Jackson is "ideological domination" and "institutional control" where "the oppressor group has the societal power to define and enact reality. The dominant group determines what is "normal," "real," and "correct." Oppression operates systematically, say Jackson, Miller, and Freire, and that while it is learned, is not necessarily conscious behavior. Hardiman and Jackson suggest that "genocide, harassment, discrimination and other forms of differential and unequal treatment...often do not require the conscious thoughts or efforts of individual people. They are part of the machinery that operates society" (Jackson & Hardiman, 1986, p. 4).

Jackson characterizes the dominant group as "frequently unaware that they are members of the oppressor group" due to their privileged position in society (Jackson & Hardiman, 1986, p. 30). Dominants are defined as those individuals who have access to resources which can be used to gain influence and power in society, enabling them to maintain social control and determine the cultural outlook of a society. They are, Jackson says "seen by others and see themselves as "normal" or "proper," as epitomizing culture and civilization while simultaneously labeling the subordinate group as deviant, sub-standard or defective" (Jackson & Hardiman, 1986, p. 6). This position, while powerful, is dehumanizing to the dominant group as well as the subordinate group.

Jackson, Miller, and Freire suggest that the effects of systemic oppression on subordinates is that they internalize the dominant group's stereotypes and biased history. Freire describes this process as the..."oppressed, having internalized the image of oppressor and adopted his guidelines" (Freire, 1972, p. 5). Miller expands this idea of the subordinate group colluding with the dominant group by explaining that subordinates are also victimized by their social position. Subordinates tend to be passive and fearful, have low self-esteem, lack the support system to challenge oppression, and experience unchannelled anger and aggression. Freire adds that the subordinate group is complicit in their oppression often because they are unaware and unable to name their subjugation. Kieffer describes Freire's proposition that

the individual becomes powerless in assuming the role of "object" acted upon by the environment, rather than "subject" acting in and on the world. As such, the individual alienates him/herself from participation in the construction of social reality. Powerlessness for Freire, results from passive acceptance of oppressive cultural "givens" or surrenders to a "culture of silence" (Kieffer, 1984, p. 5).

Consequently subordinates are unable to question authority and often see problems as stemming from within the group. The subordinates' dissatisfaction with their situation is then expressed as hostility towards each other. In the United States, manifestation of subordination includes inferior treatment, denial of privileges and equal access to resources, negative labeling and naming, enforced powerlessness and isolation (Adams, 1978; Hooks, 1981; Ladner, 1972).

Theorists discuss six primary forms of oppression in society: racism, sexism, classism, ableism, anti-semitism, and heterosexism. Only in Re-evaluation Counseling do theorists name adultism as a form of oppression. Ageism is usually discussed in the literature only in terms of the very young or the elderly. Very little information about youth exists in oppression theory. For the purposes of this dissertation I will briefly review racism, sexism, and classism because these are the primary forms of oppression that youth talk about along with their experience of adultism and ageism. I will review the literature on adultism and ageism in section II.

Sexism "is any attitude, action, or institutional practice which subordinates a person or group because of their gender" (Council on Interracial Books for Children, 1986). In sexism the dominant group is male and the subordinate group is female. Women internalize messages about themselves from institutional and cultural sources like the media, school, families, and the religious system. Some of these messages are that women should be passive and silent, women's work is not valuable, women's bodies are sexual objects. Internalized messages for women can result in eating disorders, low self-esteem and powerlessness (Miller, 1976; Neitlich, 1985; Squire 1983).

The dominant group is also affected by their participation in and perpetuation of sexist ideology. Because of gender conditioning and socialization, men are excluded from "more female roles and behaviors" for example, loving, nurturing, and caretaking. Gender socialization has stereotyped men as the primary provider for

families. This role keeps men away from home and away from their children. Furthermore men internalize messages that devalue women and can be the perpetrators of rape and emotional and physical violence.

Racism "is any attitude, action, or institutional practice which functions to subordinate a person or group because of their color" (The Council on Interracial Books for Children, 1986). Racism is not just a matter of attitudes; action and institutional structures can also be a form of racism (Commission on Civil Rights, 1970). The dominant racial group in the United States is white and the subordinate groups are African-American, Latin-American, Asian-American and Native American. White racism subordinates members of all these other groups even though some are technically considered to be members of the "white race" and even view themselves as "white" (Commission on Civil Rights, 1970).

Racism is manifested in the exploitation of people of color through lower wages, poor working conditions, ghettoizing of the group as a whole. Racism also results for example in the elimination of African American, Latin American, Asian American and Native American history and culture from institutional education, the media, and religious and legal systems. Racism like sexism effects the individual person. People of color internalize the negative messages about themselves which in turn affects their pride and self respect.

Classism is any attitude, action, or institutional practice which subordinates a person or group because of their class

background (McCaffrey, 1979). It is the systematic assignment of worth and ability based on socio-economic background. Class is social ranking based on status, power, and wealth. Classism, because it is based on social power, is perpetrated not simply by the upper class, which is the dominant group, but also by the middle class who has more power and privilege than the working class, and by the working class, who has power over the poor.

Women, children and minorities make up most of the poor and working class in our society, because they don't have equal access to power and privilege. One

of the two major causes of the feminization of poverty [is] the economic fact that women earn very little on their own and the social reality that they are more likely than ever to be on their own (Ehrenreich & Stallard, 1982, p. 222).

Unequal economic conditions limit poor people's access to educational privilege

as the economic importance of skilled and well-educated labor has grown, inequalities in the school system have become increasingly important in reproducing the class structure from one generation to the next (Bowles, 1972, p. 43).

Class structure is reinforced even when working class children have obtained access to good schools. According to Bowles,

even where working-class children attend a well-financed school they do not receive the same treatment as the children of the rich. Class stratification within a given school is achieved through tracking and differential participation in extracurricular activities. It is reinforced by attitudes of teachers and particularly guidance personnel who expect working-class children to do poorly, to terminate schooling early and to end up in jobs similar to their parents (Bowles, 1972, p. 45).

Youth Oppression

Historical Overview of Adolescence

To understand the ramifications of oppression in young people's lives we must first understand the development of the concept of "adolescence" at the turn of the century. This review of literature provides a brief historical framework for understanding how "youth" is a social and political construct which historically emerged and served to limit the full expression of the capabilities of youth.

Before industrialization, adolescence as we know it did not exist. When America was an agricultural society, children worked on the family farm. They participated in most "adult" chores and responsibilities. It was only with the coming of industry and the accompanying social dislocation that adolescence was "discovered."

Young people lived in the age-mixed social setting of the extended rural family; industrialization and urbanization have had the result that in contemporary Western society children and adolescents are predominantly socialized in a age segregated, youth oriented world (Adams & Gullotta, 1983, p. 8).

Adolescents were segregated as a result of industrialization. In the early stages of industrialization children were used as a form of cheap labor. With changing times and "the advancement of technology and mechanization, children and adolescents were no longer needed in the labor market" (Adams & Gullotta, 1983, p. 8). In addition to poor working conditions, child labor laws were enacted, such as the one in 1914 "prohibiting the employment in industry of children under a certain age, usually 14" (Adams & Gullotta, 1983,

p. 8). Finally, due to the fear that urban life would corrupt and influence the young, by 1914 compulsory education laws had been enacted, largely due to the influence of social and religious groups who viewed "adolescents as needing guidance and control, kept them in school and further removed them from the employment world and the mainstream of society" (Adams & Gullotta, 1983, p. 8).

These laws attempted to correct the worst abuses of the factory systems and protect youth from the negative effects of industrialization. Unfortunately they also had the effect of defining children and young adults as a distinct group, thus limiting their identity and capabilities. Furthermore, these laws contributed to the undermining of the traditional family structure by disturbing pre-industrial family work patterns. As Joseph Kett concludes from his research on the evolution of adolescence

to speak of the invention of the adolescent rather than of the discovery of adolescence underscores [that]...adolescence was essentially a conception of behavior imposed on youth, rather than an empirical assessment of the way in which young people actually behaved (Kett, 1977, p. 243).

Overview of Youth Oppression

To provide validity and a rationale for understanding the impact and the reality of youth oppression, it is critical to set young people's experience in a theoretical framework. Ted Clark, author of the Oppression of Youth (1975), views oppression from a psychological perspective.

Oppression is a psychic process in which a person attempts to cope with his fear and anxiety through the sacrifice of another's freedom. It is a process that struggles toward a homeostatic solution and an entirely controlled situation where all choices are predetermined, orderly and therefore completely expected. Oppression seeks the cessation of feelings of passion, through the imposition of limits on thinking, feeling, self-expression and behavior in the vain hope that these limits will defend the individual against the terror and anxiety he experiences in changing, unpredictable and therefore, potentially or actually threatening situations. The extreme consequences of oppression are the psychic equivalent of death. Oppression is a interpersonal dynamic, yet the product of oppressive relationship is self-oppression, an intra-psychic process (1975, p. 143).

This section will focus on four ways in which teens are oppressed 1) ageism, 2) adultism, 3) the manifestation of oppression within the family, and 4) the manifestation of oppression within the educational system. Ageism is reflected in the legal restrictions on teen-agers because of their age. Adultism is the psychological oppression of youth by adults. The emotional stability of teens is negatively affected by social stereotypes and misconceptions. The two primary sites of youth oppression are the family and the educational system. Teens are oppressed by parental control, and the transmittal of values and rules. The educational system also controls students by demanding submission to its criteria for learning. While society has a responsibility to socialize its children, when those efforts are extreme, it can disempower instead of empower youth. The following section will address the extremes in these four areas.

Ageism

Ageism is expressed in the laws that needed restrict rights and privileges of teen-agers. Boulding defines ageism as the restrictions on "youth which are expressed both in public policy and private utterance, particularly in Western countries. Ageism is the denial of certain rights and responsibilities to persons simply because of their chronological age" (Boulding, 1979, p. 5). "Adults control the major resources of the society. Ageism affects young people by denying many of the normal benefits and privileges of citizenship" (Schaller & Chesler, 1975, p. 2). Judicial treatment, mandatory schooling, sexual oppression, driving laws, curfew regulations, voting restrictions, all put young people under adults' power. Confined in schools young people are both unemployable and economically dependent up their parents (Schaller & Chesler, 1975). The effect of the political power adults impose is the restriction of "adolescents" thoughts, feelings, and actions in an attempt to make dissent, even rebellion, undesirable, unthinkable and impossible" (Clark, 1975, p. 2). Of course in some ways ageism serves to assist and protect teens and society. The judicial system treats young people as juveniles, which in many cases means lighter sentences, protection from hard core criminals and more access to limited rehabilitation. Laws requiring mandatory education to age 16 provide young people the opportunity to learn intellectually, socially, and politically. The educational system also provides young people with a structure around which they can organize their lives. However, the dynamics of power underlying these laws help to foster some teens'

feelings of limited control over the laws that protect them. Because of teens' status in the eyes of the law they are not involved in the process of legal decisions. Ageism, created through the laws which restrict the rights and responsibilities of teen-agers, is one of the four ways in which teens are oppressed.

Adultism

The concept of ageism is a legalistic one. Re-evaluation Counseling provides the term adultism to describe how young people are also psychologically disempowered by adults. Re-evaluation Counseling theory provides a model for understanding human beings interactions with other human beings and their environment. The theory assumes that everyone is born with tremendous intellectual potential, natural zest and lovingness, but that these qualities become blocked and obscured in adults as a result of accumulated distress experiences (fear, hurt, loss, pain, anger, and embarrassment) which begin early in their lives (Jackins, 1973). Most individuals are blocked from the natural process of releasing the hurts because of the social prescription against expression of emotions. Everyone at some time in their lives was affected by adultism because everyone has been a child.

Children are unintentionally hurt by adults because those adults themselves have been hurt. Miller (1984) concurs with Re-evaluation Counseling.

In understanding oppression it is critical that we recognize that parents who mistreat their children has less to do with character and

temperament than with the fact that they were mistreated themselves and were not permitted to defend themselves (Miller, 1984, p. 105).

Because of some adults' own history of mistreatment, a cycle emerges in which children, despite parents' emotional and physical commitment on their behalf, don't receive "full attention." Re-evaluation Counseling theorizes that when one is not operating out of one's own personal hurts and is able to be "distress free," one has "full attention" for others. Some children are affected by their parents "distress." When parents are in "distress," they may be unable to listen attentively, may overreact to children's behaviors and may over emphasize the "don'ts," "should nots," and the "no's." When children feel unimportant and not listened to they may experience humiliation, confusion or fear. When individuals are humiliated, terrorized or confused, they may feel powerless.

The myths and stereotypes about youth can be found throughout history. In 1845 an official of the New York Juvenile asylum stated that children were "thieves, liars, profane swearers, licentious, polluted in body and soul" (Loiry, 1984, p. 63). "Adolescence is usually portrayed in literature, television, and in the movies as passing through a neurotic or a semi-delinquent phase of development" (Kiell, 1959, p. 5). Today some adults continue these negative myths when they assume that many young people are rebellious, unappreciative, immoral, ill mannered, untidy, lazy children who aren't interested in growing up. Many adults believe that today's youth are "problem children" (Rice, 1987). These myths and

stereotypes may be the rationalizations of adults who need to control "unruly children." Some believe it is necessary to control young people so they mature into responsible adults; young people need to be protected from themselves. To some extent, this may be true, but by holding only these beliefs, adults avoid taking responsibility for their role in causing the problems they complain about (Clark, 1975). According to Rice, this denial of responsibility is most acute in the "treatment of the underprivileged." Rice states "thousands of these youth are denied services, benefits and help that they need to improve their education and their lives, yet they are the first to be criticized for being unemployed and idle" (Rice, 1987, p. 5). The young person accepts these negative labels as his/her self-definition and proceeds to validate this identity by continuing to behave in ways that will strengthen it" (Newman & Newman, 1978b, p. 313).

The Manifestation of Oppression in the Family

In reading this section on the manifestation of oppression within the family, it is critical to keep in mind that I perceive this issue to be a political argument. While parents are identified here as the primary oppressors, I believe however, that parenting is one of the most valuable roles an adult could undertake. Most parents are committed to doing a good job even though to an outsider it may not always look that way. Raising children is difficult, time consuming and isolating, and operates in a cultural framework.

In addition to its primary role as a socializing agent in society, the family also is a primary source of youth disempowerment

(Clark, 1975). Clark provides a paradigm in which to examine the ways the family oppresses children: 1) development of fear and anxiety; 2) dependency on authority; 3) modeling of authority; 4) transmittal of values as rules, limits, should; and 5) internalization of fear, authority and values.

1. Most child-rearing practices for centuries have implicitly encouraged "fear" in children to control them. Children look for confirmation and affirmation from others, particularly parents, as they grow up. When children misbehave, they fear the consequence, and experience anxiety, fearing they might not be loved any more by parents. Miller points out that some parents allow their children to express anger and suffering only at the risk of losing parental affection (Miller, 1985). When children cooperate with their own oppression it is often because of anxiety. "The fundamental motivation for oppression is fear and the fundamental reason for cooperating with oppression is anxiety" (Clark, 1975, p. 34). One result of this fear and anxiety is young people's sense of helplessness.

2. Parents are the first model of authority that young people encounter. Parents control both their economic and emotional resources, which fosters dependency. Dependency, of course, is a necessary developmental stage. Clark, however, also sees dependency as

a technique of oppressing young people, that is for controlling them, for inducing them to accept--indeed, need--the limits authority provides as the path for satisfaction, it is a vicious self-perpetuating, debilitating strategy (Clark, 1975, p. 44).

3. As the primary model of authority, parents represent goodness and the ability to attain economic and emotional resources. Parental authority is presented as "We do this because we love you" (Clark, 1978 p. 45). Because of this experience, children don't see authority primarily as the exercise of power; their attitude toward authority therefore is often unrealistic and naive. Young people usually don't question authority because they believe authoritarian behavior is a loving act on their behalf.

4. A fourth way in which the family controls young people is through the transmission of values. Positive values can and should be promoted in a family context. To provide a healthy structure rules are also important. It's when rules become inflexible and parents stop listening that healthy structure turns into authoritarianism: don't drink, don't smoke, don't have sex, don't do drugs. This process of indoctrination can limit and inhibit young people's sense of individuality and ability to make choices.

5. The model of authority that children learn in the family provides them with a framework for understanding and participating in the larger system including schools, laws, and other institutions that oppress them. This model is internalized and often replicated in their relationships with others. When fear, anxiety, power, domination, and submission exist in the family, they can become criteria for relationships and are most likely passed down from generation to generation.

The Manifestation of Oppression in the Educational System

The educational system is another source of authority that attempts to control adolescents. This can have a dehumanizing, invalidating and indoctrinating effect on young people to the degree that they may comply with their own oppression. Young people spend 1080 hours per year in this system. The current paradigm of education, says Freire, is the banking method. An example of banking education is

the teacher talks about reality as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalized and predictable; or else they expound on a topic that is completely alien to the experience of the students (Freire, 1970, p. 57).

This method is based on assumptions of domination and submission. Freire notes that,

the teacher teaches and the students are taught; the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing; the teacher talks and the students listen; the teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined; the teacher chooses the content and the students who are not consulted adapt to it (Freire, 1970, p. 59).

One effect of our current educational system is to make many students feel like objects. Often they do not believe in the value of their own experience. Being passive can tend to stifle creativity, and to disempower: "It tells our children that there is something wrong with them; that it is they, rather than society, that needs fixing" (Kreisberg, 1986, p. 3). Similarly, Newman and Newman note that because of the pressure to conform

students have limited opportunities for flexible self definition...[and] fail to learn the extent

of their rights or effective strategies for the exercise of power (Newman & Newman, 1987, p. 1).

Michelle Fine perceives another dimension of this oppressive educational system. She defines a special kind of talk which she calls "naming."

Naming gives license to critical conversation about social and economic arrangements, particularly inequitable distributions of power and resources, by which these students and their kin suffer disproportionately (Fine, 1987, p. 160).

She hypothesizes that it is the fear of naming these issues on the part of teachers which provides the move to silence. Not surprisingly she condemns the oppressive paradigm for teachers and argues for one that is empowering not disempowering to students.

With this educational system and these child-rearing practices, in the context of ageism and adultism, society is usually successful in controlling children until puberty. With the rebellion of adolescence, parents and society are often thrown off balance. They try to retain too much control, or are inconsistent or ambivalent about their degree of control. This disempowers youth and intensifies conflicts.

The foregoing is an interpretation of how young people are oppressed. When individuals feel they aren't valued, respected, or listened to, it can contribute to the seriousness of problems of adolescence feelings of alienation, teen-age pregnancy, unemployment, substance abuse, vandalism, shoplifting, low self esteem, and apathy. My hypothesis is that teens act out these problems in part because of an understandable reaction to ageism and adultism and the

manifestations of oppression in the family and school. Many educators would argue that a substantial group of young people have been successful and haven't been affected by disempowerment. The impact of disempowerment on these teens may not be as obvious as the tragedies of suicide, substance abuse, and teen-age pregnancy, but from my work with teens, I have seen other related consequences. Many teens struggle with low self-esteem, feel isolated and fear the authority of parents, schools and laws. They have difficulty seeing beyond their own issues and lack the ability to think critically. They are frustrated by their role in society and fear speaking out about their concerns. Because the consequences of youth oppression are so serious, it is critical to interrupt the cycle of oppression in young peoples' lives.

Adolescent Developmental Theories

Developmental theory presents concepts about adolescence which focus on their physical and psychological development. Some developmental theorists explain adolescence as being "a transition period from dependent childhood to self-sufficient adulthood" (Muuss, 1975, p. 4). During this time period, age 12 to 19, teen-agers experience the physiological changes of puberty. First, there are hormonal changes which result in growth spurts, mood swings, and the development of secondary sex characteristics and sex organs. Second, in addition to the physical changes, teens experience feelings of rage, anger, rebelliousness, love, sexual desire, enthusiasm, joy and sadness are experienced in new and often upsetting ways.

Psychosocial development accompanies physical and emotional changes in adolescence. In the eight developmental stages of life described by Erikson, there is usually a conflict between a social crisis and a central developmental problem. In adolescence the primary issue is identity vs. identity confusion. According to Erikson this is a "period during which the individual must establish a sense of personal identity and avoid the dangers of role diffusion and identity confusion" (Muuss, 1975, p. 63). Separating from family, establishing their own personal value system, falling in love, and developing stronger peer relationships are reflections of this developmental stage. This stage, with all its changes, is viewed as a time of confusion, emotional instability, isolation, and egocentrism (Adams & Jones, 1982; Elkind, 1967). In the effort to define who they are, and to discover their individual identity, young people also begin to take increasing control over their own lives. Often this involves rejecting parent's values and challenging parental control.

This viewpoint is often used to explain the problems and issues associated with adolescence. Although developmental theories offer many important insights into adolescent behavior, they are often lacking a social and political analysis. Terms used by developmental theorists such as, "rebellious," "egocentric," and "troubled" reinforce ageism and adultism in our society. An excellent example of oppressive language is found in Muuss, who uses oppressive language to characterize adolescence, as seen in the following example.

If the adolescent fails in his search for an identity, he will experience self-doubt, role diffusion, and role confusion, and the individual may indulge in self-destructive, one-sided preoccupation or activity. He will continue to be morbidly preoccupied with what others think of him, or, even worse, he may withdraw and no longer care about himself and others. Ego diffusion and personality confusion, when they become permanent, can be found in the delinquent and in psychotic personality disorganization (Muuss, 1982b, p. 97).

Empowerment

If oppression is the disease, then empowerment is the cure. Clearly individuals and groups are oppressed on many levels. Previous strategies for eliminating this oppression have not been equal to the task, largely because the problem has not been perceived in terms of power. Empowerment itself is predicated on the awareness of the loss of personal, cultural and institutional power.

Most discussions of empowerment state or imply that large numbers of people in this society are "disempowered" and that the experience of powerlessness must be emphasized in grappling with social problems. The idea and term "empowerment" emerged as a direct response to analyses of powerlessness and critiques of social structures and social forms which perpetuate domination and the corresponding urge to understand, identify, and describe processes through which individuals and communities create alternative domination" (Kreisberg, 1986, p. 33).

In this section I will review the literature on adult empowerment. I will discuss the philosophy and definition of empowerment, and specific liberation strategies. In surveying this literature I will draw some conclusions and make suggestion which apply to youth empowerment. In addition I will critique those

aspects I see as limited in their application to youth. The final part of this section will review the limited literature on youth empowerment.

A definition for Kieffer in his paper on Citizen Involvement cited Horton's components of empowerment:

maintenance of human dignity, development of ability for critical analysis, acceptance of responsibility for decision making, utilization of collective problem solving and articulating a common and concrete vision for the future (Kieffer, 1981, p. 44).

For Freire, empowerment "is to help men help themselves, to place them in consciously critical confrontation with their problems" (Freire, 1973, p. 19).

Empowerment "is the process of humanization, and a consequence of engagement in and with transforming knowledge" (Kieffer, 1981, p. 44).

Another way of looking at empowerment is a linguistic approach, breaking apart the word itself and looking at the meaning of power. Seth Kreisberg defines power in terms of "power with" rather than "power over."

Power with, for Follett, is co-action, the development of individual capacities within a greater integrative unity. She notes that power is generated and "emerges" out of interactions of "reciprocal influence" among members of an organization or community. The more people act and interact together in an "integrating manner," the more their common and individual power increases. Thus power is clearly conceived as expanding and renewable, emerging in the process of synergistic interaction (Kreisberg, 1986, p. 75).

Janet Surry's model of empowerment, develops the concept of mutual empowerment, by which she means "each person is empowered [as] the relationship is empowered" (Surrey, 1987, p. 2). For Surrey psychological empowerment is "the motivation, freedom, and capacity to act purposefully, with the mobilization of the energies, resources, strengths, or powers of each person through a mutual, relational process" (Surrey, 1987, p. 3).

Through what she calls "building the we" (Surrey, 1987, p. 15), moving from an "I" focus to a group focus, one is able to build relationships that are non-hierarchical and free from the need to oppress one another. From this new position of mutual trust there is more room for connected learning, mutual understanding and awareness. The internalization of these mutual non-hierarchical relationship that constitute the process of empowerment lead to "an increase in energy, power, or "zest," and a sense of effectiveness based on their ability to contribute to everyone's greater awareness and understanding" (Miller, 1986).

Charles Kieffer's ideas on empowerment are both similar to and different from Surrey's. Kieffer sees empowerment as a developmental process with the goal of mobilizing citizens to obtain the skills and insights to more fully participate in issues that relate to their disempowerment. When Surrey speaks of transformation, she describes a fluid process. Weaving a number of components together, she builds toward a specific result which is mutual empowerment. Kieffer, on the other hand, posits the following developmental theory of empowerment with stages:

The "Era of Entry" for citizens is the first stage of the process of empowerment. This is achieved when a person is violated or attacked to the point where he/she responds. "The provocation of empowerment, it must then be understood, is necessarily a consequence of a personally experienced sense of outrage or confrontation" (Kieffer, 1984, p. 19).

The "Era of Advancement" is marked by three distinct aspects - the appearance of one or more role models, the development of a group or organizational support structure, and the sharing of critical information to enhance empowerment.

The "Era of Incorporation" is a period of "self concept, strategic ability, and critical comprehension substantially mature" (Kieffer, 1984, p. 22). In other terms, this is the point which an individual becomes more fully aware of the oppressive situation becomes more highly developed and skills are developed to take action.

The "Era of Commitment" is marked by the integration of the knowledge gained in the previous stages. Empowerment has been achieved by incorporating this knowledge into every day life. In this final stage "participatory competence" is attained. In summary, Kieffer's developmental theory of empowerment describes a process that in the end fundamentally changes a person's world view. "Empowerment is not commodity to be acquired, but a transforming process constructed through action" (Kieffer, 1984, p. 27).

Jackson and Hardiman (1986) have developed a model of oppression /liberation development, which is based on a five stage developmental

process of consciousness raising for the oppressed and the oppressor. I will review only the process of the oppressed. The developmental stage model is similar to Kieffer's. The primary difference between the two models is that Jackson and Hardiman's includes the oppressor's process as well as that of the oppressed, where as Kieffer's does not.

Jackson and Hardiman's model focuses on the individual's developing awareness of his/her own oppression. They describe five stages of consciousness involved. These are 1) naive, 2) acceptance 3) resistance, 4) redefinition, and 5) internalization.

In the naive stage of consciousness the oppressed has little or no awareness of social issues and their own position in the social order.

During this stage, the individual is particularly vulnerable to the logic system and world view of socializing agents, e.g., parents, teachers, relatives, the media, and significant others. The messages that the person receives are usually a mixture of truths and falsehoods, about their social group membership, what is right and natural, and what is wrong and deviant (Jackson & Hardiman, 1986, p. 17).

The acceptance stage represents the internalization of the messages given by the oppressor regarding the inferiority and subordinate position of the oppressed. Rewards are offered for staying in this acceptance stage. The oppressed person may be treated as "'almost equal,' a privileged position for a subordinate" (Jackson & Hardiman, 1986, p. 17). In the exit phase of the acceptance stage the person starts to acknowledge the harmful

effect of the oppression. This is usually brought on by external factors.

In the resistance stage the oppressed begins to question his/her internalization of oppressive values. He/she may ask such questions as "who am I" and more importantly "who am I not." With this new knowledge the person may experience anger, pain, hurt and rage about their previous oppression. At this stage the person "cleanses the system of those internalized oppressive notions that have served to stifle or retard their development, and to stop "passively accepting" the oppression in their environment" (Jackson & Hardiman, 1986, p. 20). It is at this stage that the oppressed "discovers that they do have some power" (Jackson & Hardiman, 1986, p. 20).

In the redefinition stage individuals are most concerned with answering the question "who am I." This stage is where the "oppressed person is concerned with defining self in terms that are independent of the perceived strengths and or weaknesses of the oppressor and the oppressor's culture" (Jackson & Hardiman, 1986, p. 21). It is here that the oppressed shift their concerns and energy away from the dominant group and focus it on their own group. The individual is more concerned with renaming and reclaiming self and group heritage. Usually one is labeled "trouble makers" or "separatist" by members of their own group who have not yet achieved this awareness (Jackson & Hardiman, 1986, p. 22).

In the fifth stage, internalization, the person is "in the process of integrating and internalizing their newly developed consciousness as a social group member" (Jackson & Hardiman, 1986,

p. 24). He/she becomes more comfortable with the a new sense of social identity. It is usually easier for a person in stage five to have empathy for other oppressed groups. Unlike the other stages of this process, which are generally experienced and then transcended, this stage is a life long process which needs continually to be nurtured.

Youth Empowerment

As the previous section explained, youth are oppressed personally, institutionally, and culturally in our society. There is a great need for change in societal attitudes, beliefs, and values about the capabilities and potential of youth. Like other oppressed groups in society, such as women, African Americans, and the elderly, who are finding ways to liberate and empower themselves, youth need to be given the same opportunities in order to break out of their cycle of oppression.

Unfortunately, very little has been written about youth empowerment. Because youth have been traditionally viewed as apolitical, the literature has focused on symptoms of youth oppression such as the "troubled" adolescent, drug abuser, and the teen-age parent. This literature, while it does have some important insights into youth problems in our culture, generally fails to address the central issue of youth oppression and empowerment. What follows is a review of the literature that does exist on youth empowerment.

Selma Wasserman (1987) talks about youth empowerment in schools in terms of respect. She sees respect for youth as recognition of who they are and what they do, allowing them to exercise options of choice, making decisions affecting their lives, and valuing their decisions. Respect is shown

through interactions that attend thoughtfully to what children have to say, through our efforts to understand what is being said and felt, and through our nonjudgemental acceptance of those feelings and thoughts. Respect is shown through interactions that are genuine. Behaving respectfully with children is not at all different from behaving respectfully with other adults (Wassermann, 1987, p. 295).

With respect comes confidence, positive self image and a feeling of control over ones life, these are all essential aspects of empowerment.

In a Natural Location for Youth Leadership, Kielsmeier defines youth empowerment as

young people must further begin to perceive themselves as powerful. This is accomplished through guided participation in acts of leadership, citizenship, and community service. When young people realize that they can make constructive impact up the environment and others, it becomes possible for them to feel empowered. It is, after all, powerlessness, not power which corrupts (Kielsmeier, 1988, p. 6).

The National Commission on Resources for Youth published Youth Empowerment: A Training Guide (1982) "to help practitioners develop what NCRY calls Youth Participation programs" (p. ii). The training guide describes youth empowerment as

...the process by which young people learn, through active participation in the relationships, events, and institutions that

affect their lives, to develop and apply their capacity to transform themselves and the world in which they live (National Commission on Resources for Youth [NCRY], 1982, p. 1).

This manual focuses on two primary components of empowerment: "to help young people and adults develop cooperative work relationships, and to help young people assume significant and responsible role in organizations" (p. 1). The training guide outlines the following seven areas that they recommend as being essential to any youth empowerment program:

1. Individualized experiential programming--addresses personal needs, goals, and interests of young people.
2. Developmental, sequencing of youth participation activities, i.e., moving teens from a personal level of involvement to a more public perspective of taking responsibility such as joining and organization where they may be of service.
3. Opportunities for decision-making and power-sharing--encouraging young people to be involved in the decision making process of the organization they are involved in.
4. Adult-youth partnerships--after becoming involved in an organization it is important for youth to develop relationships with a adults where both the adult and the youth can learn from each other, and each can influence the organization.
5. Opportunities for reflection and evaluation--after the partnership is established it is important that the youth and adult give and receive feedback. This leads to mutual support and positive growth.

6. Training that enhances youth's access to and control over society's tools and resources--training needs to be provided in self understanding, such as communication skills, training, and practical skills areas, such as small business administration. This enables young people to feel empowered on a personal and institutional level.

7. Involvement of youth as change agents in their communities--community agencies develop programs which involve youth directly in community activities. This will allow youth to be change agents in the community.

Darwin Davis from Black Agency Executives discusses youth empowerment using a two fold model: the first concept regards what needs to happen for youth, and the second, what adults need to do to help facilitate youth empowerment.

Davis concludes that the issues of self-esteem and control are key components of empowering youth, each of which..."begins outside the individual" (Davis, 1989, p. 16). He feels that the environment and the attitude of the adults around youth can affect youth positively or negatively.

Adults, Davis believes, need to enable those without power, (in this case youth) to gain it.

Acquisition of a variety of skills, strategies, resources, etc. are a part of the process. At some juncture, the enablers must stand aside so that the newly acquired skills of empowerment are applied by the group for its best self interest (Davis, 1989, p. 17).

A potential problem that adults must be aware of in these efforts to empower youth is the tendency to "do for" rather than to

encourage youth to "do for themselves": Thus allowing full access to their own power and capabilities.

Empowerment is personal change and growth that results in a more confident, articulate, and societally active individual. Freire states that "at no time can there be a struggle for liberation and self-affirmation without the formation of an identity, an identity of the individual, the group and the social class" (Freire, 1985, p. 186). This identity develops on three levels: personal, interpersonal, and societal. Empowerment occurs when individuals become more in touch with their feelings, their intellect, their capacities, their personal pride and voice. The inter-personal component occurs through relationships with peers and adults. Janet Surrey believes that

personal empowerment can be viewed only through the larger lens of power through connection, i.e., through the establishment of mutually empathic and mutually empowering relationships. Thus, personal empowerment and the relational context through which this emerges must always be considered simultaneously (Surrey, 1987, p. 3).

When their relationships with peers and adults result in support, trust, intimacy, and better communication, teens develop a model upon which to base future relationships. When these relationships occur within the context of a constructive group, the teens are better able to present themselves more assertively in the adult world. Personal change and growth, fostered through experiences in a group can lead to more public, visible ways of exercising power.

On a societal level, teens can counteract oppressive definitions of themselves by taking positive leadership roles, speaking out about social injustices, and acting not just for themselves but for a larger community. Working in concert with a group on social justice issues not only reinforces their personal and interpersonal communication skills but also gives them an identity so they can work towards liberation and empowerment. Some characteristics that young people show when fully empowered include: feeling good about themselves, taking responsibility, becoming critical thinkers, developing a sense of personal power, becoming productive, acquiring a voice regarding decisions that affect them, initiating support, developing strong positive relationships, belonging to a group, addressing their feelings and emotions, and helping to foster change in the world (DiBenedetto, 1987; Freire, 1973; Jackins, 1980; Rogers, 1980).

Summary

In this review of literature I have focused on two major components of the oppression/empowerment dynamic. The first, on general theories of oppression, enables us to understand the roots of youth oppression. We can see the impact that adultism, ageism, and the manifestation of oppression in the family and schools have on young peoples' lives. What I have found disturbing was the fact that the mainstream literature lacks a comprehensive political analysis of youth oppression.

The second component defines empowerment in various ways. A framework is set for seeing that empowerment is an individual, institutional, and societal process. What is missing is that researchers have not applied these same theories to youth empowerment. The literature specifically related to youth primarily focused on individual empowerment i.e., self-esteem, decision-making and respect. A political perspective was lacking which, if taken into account, would encourage and support youth to move from the step of individual development to one of active collaborative group initiatives for social change.

This dissertation will expand the present literature by focusing on youth groups which include this political perspective; groups which foster both individual and collaborative empowerment.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Method/Design of the Study

To understand the process of youth empowerment, it is essential to go to youth for information. Listening to young people tell their stories about how youth groups have empowered them--going to the source--is the key to developing more effective and empowering youth programs. The most appropriate method for gathering this information is qualitative research. As Patton describes it,

qualitative measures describe the experience of people in depth. The data are open-ended in order to find out what people's lives, experiences, and interactions mean to them in their own terms and in their natural settings. Qualitative measures permit the evaluation researcher to record and understand people on their own terms (Patton, 1986, p. 22).

Qualitative measures provide significant data on young people's experience of empowerment that is presently unavailable in the field. Carol Gilligan explains the importance of this kind of research: "the way people talk about their lives is of significance,...the language they use and the connections they make reveal the world that they see and in which they act" (Gilligan, 1981, p. 2).

Subject Selection

Programs were selected based on their use of a participatory model of youth empowerment. Groups are generally led by teens in

cooperation with adult advisors. Teens tend to engage in social action such as teen theatre around social issues, policy making, input on local and national legislation, demonstrations and rallies. They generally discuss oppression and injustice, receive critical information about their issues, and experience self development. Teens experience these groups, in contrast to society at large, as safe and supportive. These criteria limit the number of groups available for study. Six groups were selected: Briarpatch (Madison, WI); Youth Action Program (East Harlem, NY); Ebony Expressions (Madison, WI); Children of War (Boston, MA); Youngstown Youth Council (Youngstown, OH); and a young persons Re-evaluation Counseling Class (Brookline, MA).

All of the individuals who were selected have been members of a group for a minimum of two years. Selection was also based on their availability and willingness to talk about their experiences. A attempt was made to balance gender, age, income and the racial identify of the participants.

Based on the above criteria, eight young people were selected to participate in this study. They range in age from 16 to 25. A equal number of men and women were chosen. The racial diversity of the participates were as follows: two African-Americans, two Latin-Americans, one Haitian-American, and three Anglo-Americans. Family income ranged from poverty level to middle class. In addition, their educational background ranged from a high school drop out to one year of college (participants who attended college were the first ever in

their family to go). A summary of personal information of the participants can be found in Table 3.1 (p. 43). Pseudonyms have been used.

Participants and groups were identified by briefly conducting telephone interviews with the adult advisor. I had never met any of the participants before the interview. Interview appointments were made on the phone and I traveled to meet the young person.

Interview Process

The interviews took place in local community centers, private homes, in the car, and at the homes of mutual friends. The participants were interviewed for approximately 90 minutes each and the interviews were tape recorded. Several weeks before the meeting I contacted them by phone to explain the nature of my research. At that point I explained the need for a written consent form summarizing the nature of my research and stating that the information shared would be confidential and that they could withdraw from the study at any point (see Appendix A).

TABLE 3.1 Personal Demographics

<u>Name</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Education</u>	<u>Family Income</u>	<u>Ethnic Background</u>	<u>Youth Group</u>
Susan	16	Sophomore	Working	White	Briarpatch
Theresa	25	High School drop out	Poor	Latin-Amer	Youth Action Program
Juan	19	Freshman College	Poor	Latin-Amer	Youth Action Program
Madeline	17	Freshman College	Middle	Afro-Amer	Ebony Expression
Martin	20	Freshman College	Poor	Haitian-Amer	Children of War
Chris	17	Junior	Lower Middle	Afro-Amer	Youngstown Youth Council
Carol	16	Sophomore	Middle	Jewish	Young People's Re-evaluation Class
Mike	17	Junior H.S.	Middle	White	Youth People's Re-evaluation Class

Interview Questions

Semi-structured, open-ended interviews were conducted to allow the young people express, in their own language, their learning experiences in the youth groups. The semi-structured format was used to allow participants to express themselves freely, but also to direct them to comment on specific themes.

The interview framework made use of Patton's general interview guide approach which outlines a set of issues, questions, and subject areas for interviewing. Patton breaks information down into categories like "opinion(s)," "feeling(s)," "knowledge(s)," "demographic(s)," and "behavior(s)" (Patton, p. 207). Using these categories my questions explored different facets of an individual's experience.

The semi-structured interview had two sections. Part I gathered information about the participants before their involvement with the group. The questions were divided into three parts personal, interpersonal (adults, peers), and societal. The participants were encouraged to discuss their lives in relationship to themselves, adults, peers, and society. The second part used the same format to inquire about the teens after being in their youth group for two or more years. Additional information was gathered about the specific structure of the group and personal demographics.

Analysis of the Data

The analysis of the data is presented in two sections. The first part will be profiles. Seidman states that "profiles are

approachable stories of everyday life rich in concrete detail and often very moving in the strength of the emotion expressed about their experience" (Seidman, 1987). The profiles consist of the actual words of the participants, not changing them unless it was necessary for clarity or confidentiality. The profiles were edited for readability because common oral speech is sometimes awkward in written form. Each profile summarized events prior to group involvement and significant experiences leading to self empowerment. I also conducted a follow-up phone session in which participants were given time to respond to the written account of the interview. The participants were advised to check for the accuracy and completeness of the interview, providing them an active role in deciding on the content of the data. This process helps empower the participants because, as Kieffer suggests, "it establishes the participant as subject of his/her own history and encourages shared control of the generation of knowledge" (Kieffer 1981, p. 76).

The second section consisted of a primarily inductive analysis of the transcript, emphasizing the patterns of experience teens themselves find important, as well as how teens frame and voice those experiences. The transcripts were reviewed and examined to discover emerging themes, patterns, or categories. The data was loosely organized into categories of personal, interpersonal, and societal experiences in order to understand the multiple levels of oppression and empowerment. Finally, I rearranged the data in relation to the

current literature on empowerment. I particularly noted similarities and differences between youths' experiences of and adults' position on empowerment.

Significance of the Study

This study provides direct information about how teens experience youth empowerment. Although there are hundreds of youth-serving programs across the nation, the majority of programs have a philosophy and level of intervention that treats only the symptoms of youth disempowerment and that frequently perpetuates disempowerment through adultism and ageism. This study provides information about how teens become empowered through programs that acknowledge systemic oppression and provides a better understanding about the ways to develop more effective youth programs that directly meet the deeper needs of our youth living in an oppressive society.

Limitations of the Study

This study was based on interviews with teens. No attempt was made to verify their experiences or present them from another point of view. The material was used to discover the generative themes and issues that hold the most promise for future planning and research in youth empowerment.

Furthermore, the data were obtained from a small number of youth empowerment groups whose philosophy is based on youth oppression. There is no comparison with other youth empowerment models to see if teen-agers name the same experiences as teen-agers who participated in the above groups. To adequately prove general hypotheses about

youth empowerment, this study would need a larger sample size, random selection and empirical methodology.

A further limitation of this study is that interviews with teenagers were not conducted over a long period of time. This limits the exploration of the long-term benefits and consequences of youth empowerment. Generalizations on the long term effects can be hypothesized but can not be evaluated by the design of this study.

CHAPTER IV

LET THEIR VOICES BE HEARD

Introduction

This chapter gives voice to eight young peoples' stories of their own process of empowerment. These stories are condensed versions of recorded interviews. Life experience before the group and the changes that have occurred during the group process constituted the focus of the interview.

The young people who told their stories were willing to take a risk and talk openly about who they are, sharing their most intimate pains, feelings, thoughts and reactions. Their honesty and openness touched me deeply. They talked with great conviction about what youth need in their world.

The group descriptions are meant to serve as an introduction to the subjects of this study. The six groups of which these youth were members all meet the criteria for a youth empowerment model as discussed on pages 40 and 41. In the interest of the participants' integrity they have had the opportunity for complete review of their profiles. To provide a context for the profiles I have included a brief summary of each group.

Group Descriptions

Briarpatch, Madison, WI, (Susan), is a teen and family counseling center, one component of which is to do prevention work with youth. The agency philosophy recognizes the importance of youth

participation and youth development as an effective primary prevention strategy. Briarpatch has a Teen Rap Line which is a peer phone help line staffed by teen volunteers. The line serves two purposes, both of which foster personal growth and development for the youth. Teens in the community who are in crisis or just need someone to talk to, can call seven days a week from 4-10 every day. Additionally, telephone staffers have the opportunity to counsel peers in crisis. The teens who staff the Rap Line are extensively trained in all teen issues. Staffing the Rap Line provides purpose, skill development and the real benefit of membership in a constructive group. Although the line is coordinated by an adult, the decision making is non-hierarchical.

Briarpatch is also a home to a group of concerned teens who have combined their interest in drama with their interest in peer helping. The group is called JABONGGIT (Just a Bunch of Ordinary Guys and Girls in Theatre). These teens perform open-ended skits which help teens and adults explore issues that adolescents face today. The young people in the group meet for about 3-5 hours per week to discuss their own growth issues. Some of the topics discussed in both groups are sexuality, gay and lesbian issues, sexual assault, suicide, family dynamics and alcohol and drug abuse.

The Youth Action Program (YAP) East Harlem, NY, (Theresa and Juan) was founded ten years ago on a very simple premise: "black and Latin kids in East Harlem have ideas about improving their community, and with guidance from adults, can make them real." The program is philosophy is that young people can learn to discipline themselves by

governing themselves. YAP is known to many of Harlem's residents by the familiar and powerful mural drawn by youth on the corner of 52 Street and Central Park Ave. A more colorful and welcoming symbol can scarcely be imagined.

A major program of the YAP is their construction company, which provides full time intensive training and academic classes for neighborhood youth. YAP construction has gutted and rehabilitated many abandoned city owned buildings, and created permanent housing for homeless young people and children. YAP is a place for the teens of Harlem to get off the street and into a safe, and positive place of their own. YAP members have also developed a political voice. They lobby for money at City Hall and run major conventions for youth of NYC. In the words of their publicity material, is a major aspect of YAP is "process of youth governance is central to our concept. Each project is governed by a core group of leaders, while the overall program is governed by a Policy Committee consisting primarily of young people. Critical decisions about staffing, program, policy, budget, and community action are in the hands of the Policy Committee."

Ebony Expressions, Madison, WI (Madeline), refers to itself as a "cultural awareness project developed as a stepping stone for learning more about the Black experience in America." Ebony Expressions is a group of about forty area high school students involved in developing themselves on a personal, cultural, and professional level. These young people are intensively trained in "comprehensive and sometimes controversial issues ranging from the

importance of family structure in the Black community to the significance of functioning in a multi-cultural society." The group meets weekly to work on self pride and esteem and to develop theatrical skills, and to write and develop skits which members perform for area schools and community groups.

The Children of War, New York City, (Martin) is a project of the Religious Task Force, an international youth empowerment movement "which utilizes the courage and vision of young victims of warfare to awaken in U.S. youth their deep desire for peace, justice and community." The Children of War program is based on the premise that young people find strength in each other. It is a partnership based on purpose, commitment, understanding and the only antidote for fear--hope.

The Children of War program brings together young people "who have suffered violence and oppression and give them the chance to release the pain of their experience in a global community of peers with a common bond." The Children of War consists of both an international and a U.S.--based component. The international group is a "floating tour group of 70 young people from war torn countries. They come together for six weeks to heal themselves by telling their own stories in a safe, loving environment, and then travel through out the U.S. retelling their stories and teaching peace. The U.S.-based groups, located in several cities are comprised of sons and daughters of immigrant parents and or of youth who have experienced the hatred of racism. These young people come together weekly to

share stories and heal themselves and to travel locally to area high schools, telling their stories and teaching peace.

The mission statement of the Youngstown Ohio Youth Council, Youngstown (Chris) speaks of "revising the under representation the powerlessness, and lack of vocal expression of youth." Based in the Mayor's Office, it consists of about 30-40 youths who initiate, organize and supervise programs and projects for the benefit of the youth of Youngstown.

One key goal of the Council is to empower youth, developing them into positive role models. The members of the council meet weekly develop their leadership skills, self esteem, peer counseling skills, and tutorial skills. The council gives youth the opportunity to participate in policy making and decision making and in addition the opportunity to develop professional job skills. The program is comprised of young people from all area schools, both public and private, including both outstanding and high risk students.

Young People's Re-Evaluation Counseling Class, Brookline, MA (Carol and Mike) is a peer counseling class based at Brookline High School. The class is led by young people. Students are taught Re-Evaluation counseling theory and are taught how to counsel each other. The focus of RC is the need to discharge or emote old hurts (which are feelings, and pains, that have not been released). The word "adultism" was coined by RC. The counseling philosophy of RC is based in oppression/liberation. Empowerment is achieved when one can function in the world without being impeded by negative messages

about ones self. The young people meet weekly to work on their own personal growth. Re-Evaluation Counseling has groups nationally and internationally. Counseling is available for all age groups.

Susan's Story

Susan is a white female from a working class family in Madison, Wisconsin. She is 16 years old, the oldest of two children and a Junior in High School. Her parents were divorced when she was two years old. She has been a member of Briarpatch for two years. Briarpatch is a youth participation agency. Susan is a member of the Peer helping component of the agency, which includes three groups - Teen Rap Line, the Board of Directors, and JABONGGIT ("Just a Bunch of Ordinary Guys and Girls in Theater"). The interview takes place at a mutual friend's home. Her story is in her own words, taken from the recording of the interview.

* * *

Anyone who's willing to take their own life just doesn't care much for themselves. I hated myself. I thought I was the ugliest, shortest, fattest, you name it, I thought that that's what I was. I couldn't make decisions. I would hate myself even more because I couldn't make the decision. I really had no concept of self esteem. It was a vicious circle.

I had no messages about myself which was the problem. I still was so connected with my mother, and I couldn't perceive myself as just an individual human being with my own problems, with my own life

away from my mother. I got very depressed and very confused, and I still needed to separate from my mother, but I couldn't.

I tried to commit suicide three times. I couldn't handle anything else. I didn't have enough energy to go on. Another day would have meant more hell, just more confusion nothing was clear. Any decision I had to make was this incredible, huge, mountain to climb. I was close to tears over every little decision. I was very, very confused all the time. I didn't have many close friends. My brother and I never got along. We hated each other--we fought a lot and so I just didn't have anyone to turn to.

My mother was very poor for a long time. She was working full time and trying to raise two kids after that she decided to go back to school. It wasn't fun, and I think that it was an important part of my life when we didn't have a lot of money but she always made sure we each got our own twelve pack of pop; just little things like that.

But there were times when she would break down and cry and she didn't know where the rent money was going to come from and my brother and I would be sitting there and as young children we were subjected to very adult material; like having to know where the rent was going to come from, feeling responsible for my mom. Just feeling like I had to be involved in family financial matters. So I was mature in that sense early on. I think that it was very hard because my mom and I were very close. We needed each other so much emotionally. She was my best friend for the longest time. She was

very unhappy. She had a chemical imbalance problem and she was depressed and for awhile I couldn't disassociate myself from her problems.

My father is gay. When people found that out they turned on me like just don't speak to me ever again. In fact, I did get the shit kicked out of me. A lot of older kids decided that they didn't like me just because of the way that I lived and would beat up on me and I wouldn't tell anybody.

Have you ever noticed like when adults talk to people who are younger they get a little lightness in their voice like "ok now, will you please bring that over there?" I got that a lot and I hated that so much. It's condescending. They're not perceiving you as a human being. You're not 18 and you're not 21 so you are not a magical adult, you're not on their level yet, and therefore you have to be talked to like a little dog. "Come here now, ok, good..." and I was already subjected to a lot of mature matters and I was, like, wait a minute, what are you talking about. I'm on the same level as you. I've always been perceived as an equal human being and all of a sudden these people are talking to me like my teachers.

I've always been very good in school. It's very important to me. I'm an over achiever. But teachers would talk to me degradingly. It's just like they don't treat you like a human being because you are younger. They treat you like your idea's haven't been fully developed yet. Like your pains don't matter. And adult people speak to you like you have to be reached down to on a

different level, condescending and the fastest way to alienate some one is to speak to them like they're not an equal person.

I just get angry. Why should I waste my time talking to these people if they're not even thinking about what I'm saying. It also affects you when you start thinking, "Why are all these people talking to me like this." Maybe I don't have a right to speak up like everybody else. It doesn't make you feel good at all and you do start questioning your self worth. Well, after a while when a lot of people start doing that to you, you either question yourself and your own self worth or you question society. And most people question themselves, because society is all around. How are you suppose to question the norms when everybody does that to you.

Uh huh, and it got to the point where I thought, "well, I'm obviously not worth it; of course I'm not worth it; there's no question about it." And that's when I got into being depressed and suicidal and not caring about things anymore. Not caring about the people I was with. Of course I didn't feel like I could make a mark on society. I didn't think anyone would have allowed me to.

My counselor, J.E., kept on encouraging me to try the training at Briarpatch and I knew someone who had gone through the training. And they said it was great and they wanted me to be in it. And I thought it was exciting. I had to call teen rap a couple of times. They basically helped me through my third attempt of suicide. I had felt fully supported by teen rap line and I decided to go get involved in it.

Briarpatch is a youth participation project--there are several things that I belong to. Teen Rap line--the theatre group JABONGGIT ("Just a Bunch of Ordinary Guys and Girls in Theater") and the Board of Directors. The Board of Directors of Briarpatch operates under the policy that if you're going to reach teen-agers you're going to need to have teen-agers on the board to tell you how to reach them. Because it's very important to have input on, you know, it's adolescent pregnancy prevention of course you need teen-agers to give input, so I was recommended.

We do have a group leader, Mary Ellen. She is the youth coordinator at Briarpatch. She is so incredible. Mary Ellen is not a teacher, but she is a guide. Like making up the skits...we have her input but she doesn't have more input than anybody else in the group. She facilitates a lot. She is an equal. She doesn't play the authority bit with you. We always have meetings and we have group decisions. She is just so supportive of you as a human being. It's amazing the difference. People immediately like her so because she is just so "one of us" you could say. I don't feel like she is the enemy, the adult enemy all around us.

JABOMGGIT--We just deal with teen issues, like pregnancy, dating, drinking, suicide and depression. We basically deal with those although we make up our own skits and it's all improvisation. We all talk. We sit in a circle and we talk. We do check-ins and check-outs which we talk about our day or week or a problem. We just do open-end skits. We'll make up something. We're working on a revised dating scene because it was too stereotypical and we got

tired of it really fast and the guys in the group hate playing these stupid brutes with only sex on their minds. They're real wonderful people. I got information about teen subjects up to my ears, and beyond, that I could use.

Teen Rap Line is a phone line. It's open seven days a week from 4-10 p.m. and it's totally manned by teen-agers. We have been trained about forty hours in every subject that we can think of. Teen-agers can just call up to talk about anything from whether masturbation is bad or about suicide. We give them referrals and we never give advice. The policy at Briarpatch is the people can help themselves. Sometimes they just need a little help or they need someone to talk to to straighten out their own feelings. We can just be there for someone to talk to and that's what we do there.

I really starting changing because I started being accepted. At Teen Rap Line we are accepting. People know that my father is gay and they like me just for me. It's a high diversity of people. You get support from them, they're able to listen well, they're open to ideas. I have a very high self esteem now about myself. Although I mean I have my ups and downs like anybody does. I feel like I'm worth it. I have my own ideas. If I want to put my ideas out, I will put them out and nobody is going to stop me because I am worth it. 'Cause my ideas are worth telling. I'm much more expressive than a lot of people my age because now I feel that even if people won't listen to me some people will and those are the people that I can make a difference with.

With teen-age depression if you're feeling depressed it's because they internalized some sort of oppression. Everyone at Briarpatch definitely believes that teen-agers are thought of as equal. Even though most of the time in every day world you aren't seen equal.

I mean once you try to commit suicide though it's always an option, but now I don't think I would ever do it again. Of course if I get depressed I always think of that as an option, but it's never going to become a reality again for me because now I know people would care if it happened. I know people would care. I know that it would devastate people. I know that I have so much to live for now. Like if I have done something really good and I'm proud of myself and I go to Teen Rap Line and I check in about how good I feel everybody just is like "that's fantastic" and they'll give you a hug. And if I go in there and I do something and I feel really bad about it then they're there for me. If I need someone to talk to or cry they're there. And they want to listen. And that's so important. It's amazing. Just think about it. I didn't really think about it, but it's amazing that difference.

I am aware of how I'm feeling a lot more and I pay attention to that and I make sure I'm never in situations where I feel uncomfortable. I learned how to work through my problems. They've taught me how to handle problems without taking it totally personally.

I am a beautiful, loving, incredible person, and they see everyone like that. And they teach us to see everyone like that. We

cry, we fight, but you always consider the person as a human and as equal.

Yes, Briarpatch is some place to go. A place where I can help and make a mark. Have a voice. And it's some place to go. It's some place to be, some place no matter what I'm wearing, etc. I'm accepted there. That's what's amazing. It's really good for me. Good for everyone.

We deal with masturbation openly, homosexuality openly. None of it is protecting us, we are people. We'll understand it. We'll form our own opinions about it. Briarpatch just allowed me to become the person that I needed to be and that I wanted to be and they didn't give me ideas, they didn't force on me opinions or anything. We operate under the idea that we're open about things. That's what I try and do.

For me Briarpatch was really important because it gave me a life outside of home and school. I'm doing something I enjoy and I'm not doing it with my mother. I'm not doing it with my father. I have my own life and my parents give me a lot of freedom and I've earned that freedom. I've earned their trust.

I feel good about myself and I feel good about other people too. And it doesn't seem like that big of a thing but it is the basic thing.

I'm much more into spreading my opinions and trying to make a mark on the world than I ever was before; because I feel that I can change. I can make a difference, I am worthwhile.

Theresa's Story

Theresa has been a member of The Youth Action Program from the age of 19 to the present (age 25). She was hired a few years ago to join the staff. She is the third child from a poor Catholic Hispanic family in New York. Theresa's family life primary consisted of group homes and foster care. The interview took place at the Youth Action Youth Center in East Harlem. Theresa was busy at work sending out flyers to youth in New York City about a major rally on issues of Youth Homelessness. She was willing to talk with me for a few hours. Her story is in her own words, taken from the recording of the interview.

* * *

She was 16 when she had me. My father was twice her age, and for some reason or another they got divorced. My father took custody of me and my sister and sent us to Puerto Rico with him and my grandparents. My grandmother got sick and I was shipped back to New York to my mother. For some reason my biological mother had a nervous breakdown. The State took me and my two brothers away and we were put in a group home.

When my biological family used to visit me I used to smack them and I used to cry. I didn't want to be with them. My mother's mother took the boys out of the home. And I was left in the Catholic group home. I was left there until I was about nine years old. I was raised in this specific group home with about 50 or 60 girls like in the same room. We used to be warehoused. I guess the best way to

describe it is like Little Orphan Annie. You would wish that someone would come and adopt you and take you away from all this stuff. I mean that was family. That's what I thought a normal life was because I didn't remember anything else.

I was an "A" student. I was exceptional. But I was also this snooty little runt and, I mean, everyone liked me when I was a kid...adorable.

I got too old for that group home and I was told by my social worker that we were going to this place upstate to watch this St. Patrick's Day play. It looked like a mansion with acres of land. I was taken downstairs to the gym. We were watching the play and everything and it was fine. And then during intermission the social worker was talking to this fat nun and then she said go get us some punch. And I did and then the lights dimmed and then I went back to my seat but the social worker never did. And the play was over and she was just like gone. But I didn't realize it so I went to the fat nun and I said "where's my social worker we need to go back to New York." And she was like "no you're staying here. This is your new home." And I was like what?

I freaked out and I was running everywhere, counselors kept on running after me. They caught me and dragged me upstairs. But I kept running down the stairs and they would catch me again. Then the nun like sat on me and told me she wouldn't get off me until I promised that I would stay and not run.

I was there for four years. I was pretty much a loner. With the counselors, the turnover rate would be so high that you would get

close to somebody and then they would leave. Then you were just, like hurt. And then you'd just, like start building up this wall so that no one could get in--and you can't give any affection to anybody, so that when the person leaves it's not hard because you're not attached to that person. That's what I did for a long, long time.

I was just, like really closed. I guess I had an identity. My identity was very strong character and I was this tomboy. I loved nature. I loved sports. And I also loved to be by myself. I never really got along with anyone.

Well at 13 I grew out of that home and I was suppose to go into another group home until I was 18 or 21. But they found this foster family in NJ. I only spent three month there. I guess they wanted this like, normal 13 year old. I was 13 but I was much smarter, no brain,--well, brain-wise,--but also experience in life because I've always had to depend on myself. And I've had to fight for myself to keep anything I wanted. So I was already this grown person at 13 and they didn't like it.

I was strong, hard, no feelings, because with feeling you have pain, a very outdoorsy person, a loner. I would communicate. You could tell me your problems; I will not tell you mine.

My social worker came and said "Listen: Your biological mother wants you and you have to pack up again." And I mean I was never asked what I wanted. And it was already in the files in my record

that my uncle tried to molest me during our visits, and that my Mom was abusive and stuff. But they shipped me to my biological family anyway.

I was just going on 14. I was never with my biological mother. I was always with my grandmother. I was down there to be a maid. It was like holy hell. They kept me out of school because it was in the middle of school season.

I was put into special education even though my academic studies and everything were up to par. They said I was out of the main system for a while so they put me into special education. And that screwed me up.

They treated me like garbage. I realized when I was upstate I thought I was white. My ethnic was white cause I'm white skinned and blonde hair, white. I didn't know any Spanish, and everybody liked me cause I was white.

When I was treated white everyone believed that I could be whatever I wanted to be in life. And they gave me every opportunity, even if it was in a group home. They gave me every opportunity to fulfill my dreams. Then when I came to New York, the school I went to was like garbage. They didn't care. They didn't try to help you to get out of the situation that you were in and try to improve you.

I probably got beaten up more times than the normal person would because I was very outspoken and had very strong convictions on who I was or what I wanted. I guess my biological family didn't like that very much.

I concentrated on cutting classes and becoming this macho,--not macho, but tough person because I guess I was so defenseless at home that I had to make it up while I was in school.

My sister and I were shipped to my uncle's house. I was sexually assaulted for three years because they would always ship us back to his house even though we told them not to.

I was physically abused by my mother and my grandmother. So after three years I couldn't take it any more. I ran away with my sister. We got to Covenant House.

After eight days my biological mother found us. So they were going to ship me back, because they had no reason to keep me from her. I guessed the only way that I'm going to get away from this woman is for the social workers to see that she hits me. And that's what I did.

Well, I winded up in a group home in Queens. I guess it was like transitional housing. I didn't get the help that I needed psychologically: I guess they call it a nervous breakdown but I don't. I call it frustration. But the group home couldn't deal with it. So they put me in mental institution and I was there for three months. I came out July 3rd. July 4th I went to a friend's house. July 5th I was raped violently by a stranger and by the end of July I was back in a mental institution because I couldn't deal with it. I was in for three months, then the psychologist didn't feel that I was good enough to leave. I was still violent. I just felt that I could not trust men. I beat them all up. I mean my rage was so strong

that it took seven men to hold me. Over any little thing I would fight. I would literally hurt you.

I was angry. I was just enraged. I had a lot of hatred in me. My grandmother called and told me that if I stayed in Brooklyn with them that wouldn't have ever happened. And that was, like, the last thing I wanted to hear because it did happen when I was there and it was their own son/brother that did it.

This all happened when I was 16. I was then put into another group home. They didn't put me in school but they put me in this day treatment program with these retarded kids. Then, when I was 17 they put me in a training program for retail. When I was 18 the group home felt I was too smart and didn't want to keep me.

At 19 I left to go into a transitional house in East Harlem, Home Away from Home. I felt like everytime I was gonna get somewhere someone would knock me down in society. So I had basically given up.

Then, while I was there, the coalition (Youth Action Program) was connected to the program. P. had asked the director of Home Away From Home if they could bring down a couple of girls to City Hall for a vigil. So I asked what I was like going to get out of it. Then P. started talking to me about the coalition and what I could do. Then I met Dorothy. She came out and she was [saying] does anybody want to come inside city hall and see what it looks like? It was like going to the White House, but in New York. Dorothy was explaining to me about the budget process.

It was this huge chair and it was like a king's chair. It was like really humongous and I sat on this chair and I'm looking at all

these people. And I just felt like power. It's hard to explain but I guess that's when I knew that my thing was politics. That's where you can make a difference in the world with politics. I knew that sitting in that chair you can do a lot. And then after that I started becoming more involved and more involved.

With YAP there are a lot of programs. A friend betted me that I couldn't do a man's job. YAP has a construction training program, -- 50% construction and 50% was academics. I was the first women on my crew. There were a lot of obstacles, like this site manager he took a shining to me and liked me. Some stuff happened. I went to my counselor and I told her about it. Then we had this huge meeting. And I believed that they would believe him. Then the board was brought in and then he was fired. I couldn't believe it: I'm like these people really do listen to me. I mean, it's finally justice. For me it was finally justice that this man didn't get away with what he did. Ever since then I started believing like in the program. And I joined the policy committee and became very vocal.

Dorothy, I guess, took me under her wing. I fit a lot of statistics. All the social workers would say well she'll never make anything of her life. But not Dorothy, we did a lot of one on one time together. She would say "Theresa stopped thinking that. Stop using your life as something to blame. You're an adult and you have to realize what you're doing. You're screwing up in this program and you have to realize what's important."

When I came here I was still upset and still didn't trust anybody. I was still sheltered and I tried to commit suicide. But, it's like, they didn't rush me. They didn't kick me out. They kicked me out once, but that was my fault. They didn't hover over me so fast. They didn't protect me so fast. They let me go at my own pace and they let me experience what I had to experience and to build a bond. They allowed me to feel out the place. And if I didn't come one day to a meeting they would call the house and say "Well, what happened. We missed you. We feel that you have important input." They would make me feel important so I would come the following week. They would say you can just basically be useless or you can use your experience in what happened to you to benefit other young people and to benefit social workers and teachers.

It gave me the power and the belief that I had something to say, and to structure it not in a negative way. Young people looked up to me and I would help them a lot in their situations. I joined like every single program while I was here. Not joined, but participated in. There are like nine program's. There were meeting, projects, things to do. Lots of things to do.

I've been on talk radio doing presentations. I've gone to different conferences around the U.S. speaking on youth issues, and youth action. I've been to the Capital Hill and testified on the racism that's in schools and been on a syndicated show. I've been to three countries, and a lot of panels on youth issues, on foster care, and on abused children.

This was my haven. I used it to the best ability that I had and now they're using me. Now I work at YAP. I organize young people to make political or social change. I try and open their eyes to not just see Harlem, but to the world around them.

I'm a caring, sensitive, compassionate person who has made or tried to make everything that has gone negatively in my life turn around and make it positive for others.

What broke down the barriers, I guess, is this place. You can't walk around here with no heart.

Juan's Story

Juan is a member of The Youth Action Program from the age of 14 to present (age 19). He was hired a year ago to join the staff. He is the youngest of five children from a poverty stricken Hispanic family in East Harlem, NY. His disabled grandmother raised him and his brothers and sisters.

The interview takes place at the home of Dorothy Stoner who's the founder of the Youth Action Program. Juan and 12 other youth people were gathered there to work for the weekend on the development of a legislative bill called Youth Build Coalition for \$200 Million dollars. This legislation bill will be submitted to the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America. The purpose of the bill is: 1) To supply permanent and affordable housing for the homeless and low-income disadvantaged young adults; 2) To provide opportunities for meaningful work and 3) To enable

young adults to obtain education and employment skills necessary to achieve self-sufficiency.

Juan was willing to talk with me on his two hour break. I must say this was an unbelievable experience to meet 12 young people representing a diverse group of racial and ethnic backgrounds willing to come together to discuss and develop a legislative bill on a national level. This just illuminates what is possible when young people are believed in.

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Yeah, East Harlem, It's tough. Before I joined the Youth Action Program, the only place I felt I had was the streets in my neighborhood where people used to shoot up drugs and shoot each other and hookers all over the place. That was the kind of place that I thought was normal. I didn't have opinions, I didn't care. I didn't have no feelings. It didn't matter to me what was going on.

My family lived on welfare. My mother wasn't too responsible. She had me for nine months and that's it. I didn't have no feelings towards her. When I was small she used to leave me with my grandmother just for her to go out dancing and to stay with men. And it was a different man every week. I used to see that and I'll never forget that. It messes up the child. I don't call her Mom. I call her by her first name. I still don't get along with her very well. My real biological father I don't know cause he left. I don't think I'll look for him ever because I resent what he did.

My grandmother raised all five of us. Instead of calling her grandmother I call her mother. She was kind of old and she lost her

leg. But she managed to take care of all of us in a small one bedroom apartment in a poverty stricken neighborhood in East Harlem.

It's too bad that she didn't make my brothers and my sisters go to school. They are all early high school drop outs. My brothers and sisters fight every day and hang out, just wasting their lives. There wasn't no one in the family who was working.

I was surrounded by violence. I had no positive role models; my family fighting all the time, taking drugs, you know, it just wasn't good. I used to be a really bad kid. A lot of people used to not like me. Because of the family problems, I ended up going into special education in school. I was targeted as an emotionally disturbed child because of all the troubles at home. I started acting up in school. I didn't even know how to say the alphabet. No one ever took time to teach me at home.

When I was nine years old there was a positive role model that came into my life. That was my step-father. He kind of took me into his arms and taught me all of the things that I needed to be taught. But it was still difficult...just watching my friends drop out of school take drugs and get arrested. I was kind of following in the same footsteps that they were. Even though my step-father was around trying to teach me the things right from wrong. I still caught myself following them. I got arrested. I was only ten years old, when I got caught robbing a store. I smoked grass and drank a lot. The peer pressure was bad. The streets were bad, I would get

into fights in school and I used to get cut up. Everytime we used to get money we just used it to buy alcohol and drink our heads off.

In school I never got along with the teachers. They didn't care how I felt. I wanted to turn my life around and really get down pat. The teachers would just not respect how I felt. I used to tell the teacher, "I don't get this lesson that you taught today." I felt that they should have run the lesson a different way, a better way that I would understand. And the teacher would resent that. They would say I don't want to hear it, just get out of the class. He would threaten me that he would fail me.

I was still in the special education class. I was on the Dean's list, not for being good but for being bad, when I met this guy who was the same age as myself, 14. It was a changing point for me. He invited me to come over to his place called, Youth Action Program, where they had a youth patrol. And at that time even though I was acting real bad and I didn't care about myself or about society, I always wanted to become a police officer because I lived across the street from a police station. I used to play cops and robbers. I used to always love being a cop. I remember the first meeting I went to. There were about 10 young people and this white lady. She points at me and says, "What's your name, where are you from, how do you feel about what was talked about in the meeting?" I had this attitude so I said, "What do you care what I think. It doesn't matter what I think." Well I finally went along with it. I believe she used psychology on me. She encouraged me to explain more, and

little by little, I started telling how I felt about what we were talking about.

After the meetings, I got more comfortable. They made all the young people feel comfortable. After that I would come every day because the streets didn't have nothing for me. The adults working there always welcomed me. I was never exempted. I was never told to leave. I was never told "Get out of here kid. You're a pest." I was always talked to. I was always welcomed. They used to buy me lunch. They used to really care about me. The greatest thing about Youth Action Program is that they believed that young people have a talent; but that society made it seem like they were worth nothing and the, Youth Action Program, brings that out in a young person. They brought that out of me. That I was someone and I mattered. There were meetings every day. There was something to do at YAP;-- whether it was to paint the buildings or discuss some programs we wanted to develop. Every day there was something to do. They gave me leadership skills. I used to sit down and they used to work things out of me. They used to say how do you feel about this or how do you feel about that. If you were the mayor what would you do. They just worked my shyness out. They put the self-esteem in me that I didn't have. The leader Dorothy told me that she thought I was a true leader. She took it upon herself to teach me leadership skills and to build my self-esteem and my confidence. I was given facts about my people, poverty, racism, and about life.

I was one of the main young people who one year wrote \$7.5 million into the budget for job training. The second year, \$12.5

million. We made speeches in front of council people. One time I made a speech to Mayor Koch. Koch wasn't the type of person who wants to sit down and listen to young people. We would sit down for 48 hours in front of city hall with our t shirts. Every time an official would come up, we would tell them don't forget to put money into our coalition for 20 million.

I was the chairperson on the policy committee for three years. That was a wonderful experience. That was my real changing point in terms of me being educated, knowing how to express myself, how to talk, how to listen to other people, how to respect other people and their opinions. The policy committee taught me and others how to make up a budget. I mean we were dealing with \$400.000 or \$500.000 that was given to us by foundations, private agencies and city and state government. We learned and did everything.

You know I was the only one, the first one and the only one to graduate out of high school in my family. Yeah, I'm now attending John J. Criminal Justice College and I'm just waiting to be called to the police department. And hopefully I plan to, in the long run, be commissioner of the police department and see if I change some of the things that go on in the department. In New York City alone there's only one Puerto Rican police captain.

I just want to say that the program works. I'm an example of it working. Adults have to give young people a chance. We need to be heard, and respected. We are the future.

Madeline's Story

Madeline has been a member of Ebony Expressions from the age of 14. She is the youngest of four girls in a black upper Middle class family living on the west side of Madison, WI. At the time of the interview she was 18 years old. The interview took place at the local community center where she has been working before entering her freshman year at the University of Wisconsin as a marketing major. Her story is in her own words, taken from the recording of the interview.

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Before Ebony Expressions, which was before my first year in High School, I was really quiet. It was easy to push me around. People would talk about me. All I would do is cry. I'd run away. I was really shy and was afraid to get in front of people. I was sort of a push over. People would laugh at me because I was so quiet.

My self esteem wasn't really good. It's always been low. In my family with my sisters two of them are a lot darker skinned than I; so when my sister would get mad at me, she would start talking about my skin color and how my face is oval and my eyes are slanted. It hurt. It really made me think, god I must be ugly. I used to hide everything about me. I used to get mad at myself. I used to hide in my room, and I have a picture of me--it's kinda embarrassing. I have a picture of me when I was two-and-a half years old, and I found it a few months ago. There were all these pin holes in it. When I got mad at myself, I used to poke holes in the picture. I used to hate

things I use to do, or if my sister would talk about me, I'd get mad at myself because I looked the way I do; so I would poke holes in it.

Adults always scared me; they were so big. They were kind of a mystery...I always had butterflies like I was doing something wrong. Well since I grew up on the west side of Madison, we were one of very few black families who lived out there. My friends' parents--I always felt like I had to prove to them that I was worthy of their son or daughter's friendship because they were always skeptical of me. I was one of maybe 10 black kids in the whole elementary school.

My best friend L., she was white. Her dad came from sort of a family background that wasn't racist but was kind of prejudiced against blacks. He was nice but in a weird way. He always thought I was pulling her down, but I was the one getting good grades, better grades than L. I was pushing her to do as well as she was.

With teachers I always had a problem with them. I have two favorite teachers, but when I had them I really hated them. They were the ones who drove me to do more, to do better. They knew I had the potential. I never really got close to a teacher. That's one of my problems now. I never understood that I could go in and ask them for help.

One of my biggest problems was I was always treated as an outcast in high school by the black students. Most of the black students were there just to sit around, which is basically what they did. And it really made me mad because they were the ones giving me the stereotypical bad grades--just out here to get pregnant at 15. And it made me fight harder. I was always proud of winning the book

fairs, and I always won the math meets. I almost won the spelling bee. I came in second. It was my way of showing people, especially the people who thought of us as a weird black family who moved to the west side of town, that I had just as much right to be there as they did. I proved it by doing just as well or better than their son or daughter.

What I really wanted to know about life was that I was loved.

[A] man named Ed Holmes told me about this group called Ebony Expressions. It is a cultural awareness project, and it is a group for minority students. It's a group to make people aware of how teens feel about today's issues and to let people know how we feel. That we have opinions about things that adults really don't think we have opinions about. It sounded great. I got interested, and he said I had to do an audition. He made me dance, talk and sing in front of a group of 30 students. This was the most embarrassing day of my life. We would all meet, about 30 students. We would start doing theater exercises to get us ready for a play we would be doing during black history month.

[We did activities] that made us become a part of each other--like trust exercises lifting everyone up; massaging each other's backs. We did different things that made us all closer. When the time came for the play we felt like a group, like one person.

We would meet 2-3 times a week. We would talk about problems that we might have with each other. We would talk about school, teen pregnancy, the importance of family and community. We would talk

about the articles with statistics saying bad things that made all black people look terrible. Like the average person has only a GPA of 1.8 and comes from a broken home. [You know] I am a person who has both my parents, and I am doing really good in school. I always get mad when they say things like that. It makes me look bad along with my peers in school--so we would do plays on these topics and then have discussions on them.

My first year I was really quiet and embarrassed. After a while I started thinking, "Oh that's not that bad having people looking at me." It doesn't mean that they are laughing at me. I started to get more self confidence, more feelings that I can handle this I can even help someone else. I started looking people in their eyes. That was the biggest part. Before, I couldn't let my eyes meet someone else. I would get up in front of an audience of 2,000 people and having a speaking part it can really change you.

The strength comes from the dedication that you put into it. I was molded by the people in the group. We were sort of the cream of the crop. We were the ones who wanted to break down the stereotypes and just prove to everyone that we were gonna be as good as we could be.

Ed pushed us. He pushed us to our potential, and at times we hated him for it, but afterwards it would make a big difference. Ed made me be a leader. I became more informed in the world. I learned more about myself in relationship to the world around me. It all made me see things in a different way.

I still have some of my shortcomings, but I'm not ashamed about myself now. I always smile a lot. I love to get in the middle of the action. I want people to notice me. I feel like people can't be around me unless they respect me. I had to start thinking for myself. I had to put myself in that number one slot. I couldn't let people run over me anymore. I have alot more pride in myself.

I want to make things more equal for everyone, more fun for everyone. I want everything to be better. I have a real optimistic view. I realize that all different groups of people are discriminated against, and it is terrible. I'm one of the people who wants everything to be so much better. My senior English teacher said that I was a hopeless romantic.

[One specific thing that really stands out for me is] when everyone stood in the circle, we all held hands, and Ed just told us this is it, we got to do it, and I mean everyone was so nervous, but we all held hands, and we sent our individual power through everyone just to make it One Big Power.

Martin's Story

Martin has been a member of Children Of War from the age of 16 to present. He's presently 19 years old and attending Connecticut College, majoring in Music. He's the middle child of three children, the only son. He is a Haitian American. His parents left Haiti during severe political unrest in the 1960's. He was raised a strict Catholic in a poverty stricken single parent household. His parents were divorced when he was young. The interview takes place on the

Boston Common. Martin was very willing and excited to do this interview. He's a very outspoken young man--his speaking style was one of deep passion about the issues that we spoke about. Martin moved me so that he left me feeling like he could be the next Martin Luther King--he so deeply wants to change the world so that it's a better place to live.

* * *

I wasn't accepted by any group because I wasn't white and I wasn't a Black American. I'm Haitian American. But even the Haitian's didn't accept me because I wasn't completely brought up in the culture. I was distinctly different in the way I talked, the way I dressed, and the food I brought to school. Things like that caused alot of pain for me as a kid. With kids, if you aren't any specific thing then you aren't anything and that is a good reason for ridiculed.

We moved from NJ to Boston when I was ten years old. I left my friends behind in Catholic school. Public school is alot different and this school was alot harder and by this point my parents were separated.

Before I came to Boston I had a really bad experience. I had basically been raped. That really f-----ed me up inside and I thought I was absolute shit because of it. Being really religious I thought I was damned to hell...my self image was really low. (I thought) rape was only a women's issue and I'm a guy and it wasn't really violent. I put it into another context in my head...I never really thought of it until a little while ago. I realized now it makes

perfect sense. That was a major reason why I felt so down about myself and no matter what I did and no matter what anyone said I wasn't good enough for myself.

My mom was on her own and we just moved to Boston and she was going through a lot of problems. There were times when there wasn't food or heat and she was crying and she was thinking she was doing a lousy job. She couldn't really help me and she wasn't really supportive of me. As a result of that, there was a lot of hatred and things that grew between us. And I was doing really terrible in school. All she could do was deal with her own problems and just put me down. After a while I didn't care. I pretty much gave up on school and tossed it in. I didn't do anything.

When I was a little kid I had two sides. I really liked myself and I liked the person I was, but at the same time I didn't like myself at all. I felt like I didn't have a chance in the world to do anything I wanted to do because I was dumb and I wasn't smart enough. I didn't think I could do anything. Not because I couldn't, I just couldn't succeed at anything because no matter what I did it didn't work.

That pain was connected; that pain of not being accepted for who I was no matter what the situation. I was always limited because I was black there were only certain things I could do. People just assumed that I just couldn't do or because I felt limited that way. I felt like I didn't get any support from anyone and because of that I felt weak all the time. I didn't get any support from my family;

especially my mother because she wasn't there. She hated me and told me I was stupid anyway, and my father wasn't around.

The image wasn't really clear. I remember I was really upset with myself and I tried to kill myself a couple of times. I don't really understand all the reasons why--because things were bad--Well I didn't want to live anymore and I wanted to go to heaven because the world seemed really dark--the hope for me was trying to help improve things and I felt there wasn't any hope in that and that things were going down and there was no purpose for me being here because everyone was tied into what they were doing and no one cared about anyone else so there was no purpose for me because that wasn't what it was all about. I felt like I had been on the wrong planet.

I remember one time I took a lamp and I pulled out the light bulb and I took out a pair of scissors and I stabbed it right into the lamp and all the fuses in the house went out. The scissors touched the metal on the side and melted the scissors. All the electricity flowed through the scissors and didn't get my hand. It didn't hurt me at all. After that I had tried a good two or three times. After that I felt he (god) mustn't want me to die because it was ridiculous. What he (god) really wants you to do is suffer the rest of your life. After that point my attitude got better.

Adults wanted me to respect them, but they wouldn't respect me. In school, teachers were supportive but condescending because I was a troubled student. I got left back twice. I could feel the vibe that they really didn't believe that I would improve.

I was on student council. I was always bringing things up ... I organized the other students to change the rules, but the board of trustees would always overturn them. They always gave me a hassle about my hair (he takes off his hat--his hair is long in the front, short on one side and razor cut in the back.

[My hair] represents to me being completely an individual. I always make it clear that I am not any one else and that I'm not part of any group and I can't pretend to be. I wanted to be, and I really tried, but I had to give up. Most of my friends happen to be white because the majority of black couldn't deal with me...there's alot more pain between me and the blacks students...With black guys, no matter what I did, it was always wrong the way I talked, looked and/or thought. I never expected any kind of bonding. Black American's in the U.S. only understand what it means to be black in America; they don't understand what it means to be black in a European or international sense. Being black in the U.S. means you can't like white people. If you had more friends who were white it means you didn't like your blackness...That wasn't a question for me I knew I was black, and I know I didn't have to hate anyone or dislike anyone...At one point I said well then I'm not black, I'm Martin, and that's who I am I'm not my skin; and if I wake up in the night at dark, I don't see my skin, all I know is who I am. They didn't understand that.

Miss Wallace suggested to me a few times to come to the Children Of War. She thought I would be interested. I never really did go...then I got kicked out of school and I wasn't doing anything.

She asked me to come again. They asked me to speak at a H.S. I had never spoken before...Miss Wallace said just talk about yourself. Your Haitian experience in America. My family's experience. The historical reason why they left Haiti and their lives as a result of that here in the U.S.

Miss Wallace saw how I really got pissed about how the American kids always made fun of the foreign kids because of the way they talked or the way they dressed or just because they were different. The American kids were ignorant and prejudice and I hated that. And she saw that I could do some good being in the Children of War and speaking out against this stuff. Children of War is basically made up of immigrants or the sons and daughters of immigrants of the U.S. [What we do is] we go to High Schools and personally share with the whole group what we have experienced in our lives being foreign in this country. Coming from a country that is war torn, we shared about our experiences and the pains...we try to teach people to understand that there's more to people than just the faces. There is more to people than she's Cambodian or she's just that or he's that. There's a whole story behind every person.

My friend Rong, who is Cambodian, the first time I went to speak, she spoke too. I had no problem speaking after her because she spoke about her experience in Cambodia. How she watched her father be killed in front of her and how the soldiers cut out his heart and showed it to her and told her that if she cried that they would kill her and her family. Being a very young teen-ager she had

the power inside of herself to save her whole family and bring them out of Cambodia into Thailand. And you wouldn't know it from looking at her. You wouldn't know the story at all behind the face. But the Children Of War go to High Schools. And you get the same people who are listening to you being the same people who would yell at her and say stupid things to her on the street or just assume this or that. Now they understand her as a person and her pain. Students now understand that it's a real human issue this war and this hatred thing. The message to the students is just do your part.

How Children of War works is that we have meetings weekly. There are about 15-20 people. When we get there we will break up into different groups and we share with one another how/and what we been going through. It was a support group.

There is no adult leader. The kids really basically lead it. The adults are advisors and supportors. There are several tours. A tour is a group of young people traveling around the US telling their stories to highschoools, city halls, churches, etc. I belong to the local chapter, but there is an international chapter that are made up of kids from other countries.

You have these questions. You're looking at the city you live in. You see the homelessness out in the street...people are hungry...people are hurting each other--you don't understand; you know it's stupid...you don't think anyone cares. Then you find this place where everyone really talks things out. And these people really do care. Then you start realizing that out there--that it's just that no one has a place to go and really talk about things or

they don't really have the time because they're really caught up in their lives. And just knowing that is part of like a healing because you know that people do care. Children of War answers that for me, and it gives me a feeling of purpose because that is what life is about to me. Life is about dealing with problems and me learning from those problems and growing and having a lot of really funny, strange, or sad experience from those problems. And Children Of War is a part of that, and it has taught me all that. It has taught me that.

It deals with a lot of things that affect people inside and it covers all the bases for me because I need to have the feeling of emotions. Life is emotion to me. It's not factual. It's what you feel. Experience for me is what you feel when you start, and when the experience is over, what you've learned and how you feel from that and how you move on from that. Children Of War has been a major part in helping me get further in touch with my emotions.

I have changed my attitude because before the Children Of War all I had to go by was me, God and the friends that I have. And basically that's what I have still, but somehow Children of War has brought it out into something that I can actually work with my hands. It was all in my head before.

I remember one time we were all together...and one of my friends said, "like never in a million years has it been that a Haitian, a Cambodian, a Black South African, a Jew, and Anglo Saxon, a White South African, and all these different people were all sitting in the

same room talking about the same thing, agreeing about, and it's like never happened in the history of the world, and just knowing things like that I felt like for myself maybe it's just like in my life I felt like this was a real time of change. I don't know for sure if it's going to make a difference, but as long as I know we're working towards it, it make me feel clear inside. That's what Children Of War has done for me.

We sit around and talk about different things that different people have seen and gone through. There are so many stories to be shared. The Children Of War is about how I feel, about fears, about hopes, about dreams and things like that. Nothing is not spoken about. There is nothing that anyone can't speak about, I mean the issues, the pains. I can talk to them about more things than I can talk to about with my closest friends. We speak what we feel. Another key thing is everyone learns to listen really well to everyone. I have learned to act on my opinions and live my opinions now. I've met alot of people who do what they really believe in. Children Of War basically has reinforced in me all the beliefs I already had...but I'd probably be just as confused as I was before. My message to adults is that people have to learn to listen to other people's pain. Don't limit us. Don't pretend that we're that simple, We're complicated individuals who are dealing with real problems. Don't weigh the severity of my problems, to the seriousness of adult problems. My pain, my problems my issues are just as severe, just as important to me. Don't downplay how I feel or what I'm going through because somehow I'm less important because

I am younger. So don't cut me down. Don't make it that simple. Don't make me feel small. Don't limit me. Don't pretend that because I am a child, because I am young I don't think about important issues. Educate me about what the facts are, and I'll give you the right answers. I don't need to be a certain age to be able to do that. My message covers racism, sexism and everything. Because people limit one another because of their race and they decide that people can't do a certain thing or can't see a certain thing because of who they are. People have to learn not to do that to one another.

For me empowerment is the realization of inner strength: is the realization of the strengths within a person or being, that have always been there but may have been lying dormant because of preconceptions that the person has had upon themselves as far as thinking that they didn't or couldn't do something. And then suddenly realizing that they can, and they always had the power, and that all they had to do was believe that they had it, and they could use it for their benefit. The realization is acquired through the lifting up of a person by other people, through education and sharing and pushing people to speak what they feel and bring all things out, I think causes empowerment too. Because when there's nothing that you can't say, when there's nothing that you can't feel and express, then you're free.

Chris' Story

Chris is a black male from a lower-middle class, family in Youngstown, OH. He is 17 years old, the oldest of two children. He has been a member of The Youngstown Youth Council for 2 years. I met Chris at the home of Dorothy Stoner, the founder of the Youth Action Program. Chris was with a group of 12 young people who were working together to develop a legislative bill on a national level for youth employment and housing. He was willing to take time during his break to share his story with me. His story is in his own words, taken from the recording of the interview.

* * *

I wanted to be successful. I guess you could say my mother molded me in that way and me not wanting to be like my father as far as him being addicted to drugs. And I admired my uncles and always wanted to follow in their footsteps because it always seemed like they were taking that successful path. So I wanted to be like them. My mother and father separated a lot; so during that stage of when I was growing up he wasn't around. So when we moved back together again he was still treating me like I was still young, when I had matured a lot.

Well, my mother made me grow up fast. Not intentionally, cause now she wishes I would stay as a child. My mother and father would have to leave the house sometimes; so when I was 7-8 I had to take care of my little sister and cook. So it was like I was running the house.

Well some teachers listened to me, or at least they appeared to take what I said into consideration. But some just treated me as, "You're just young, you don't know what you're talking about. I'm older; therefore I have more wisdom than what you could ever have." So I was always wrong in their eyes. I just kept away from them. I never said anything any more.

I had a teacher who just didn't like me because she read my transcript. And they said I talked a lot. Well I did when I got my work done. She didn't like me. And she plotted on getting me out of the honors class.

She put down that I had an "F" for reading and "C" for English. With my friends we always had this little contest going about who got the highest grade. So everyone always wrote down each others scores so they knew I didn't have that. I wanted to be at the school meeting because she met with my parents, and I wanted to be there and bring my friends, but the principal was like, you know how they are, they believe the teacher before the student. So I never got to speak to them. But I got kicked out of honors class because of that.

When she kicked me out of honors I kind of got into drugs, and so when I got into drugs I started thinking about suicide, and so when I got into the ninth grade I just annoyed people to make them hate me. Like I would always pray to God and ask him to take me out because I'm not going to kill myself. I was like I'm not going to commit suicide because that's a sin. So I just figured I would pray to God to take me out early and there won't be no problem. So I

annoyed people because I didn't care. I was like I'm gonna be gone by the end of this year so it doesn't matter.

To tell you the truth, I tried so hard to forget my ninth grade year. Basically I knew what my mother was going through. I was a financial burden on her, because my father wasn't doing anything and she had to feed us, me and my sister, pay for clothes, bills, and loans. So I thought if I'm not here she wouldn't have to worry as much. But I guess I wasn't meant to go.

With drugs, it was boring. It just didn't feel right. I was like it's not me. I quit. It's like if you really want to quit and how much faith you put in God. If you are very sincere you will be able to quit without all those complications. This friend, who I always had little contests with, called and said like "I'm in a youth council now. Why don't you come down." But I didn't come down the first year. They started in October of 87.

So then I just went down to check it out one day. I didn't want anyone to think I'm a quitter, so I guess that's the reason why I stayed. And just the fact to excel.

The whole group of 30 to 40 kids meet every other week. But all the committee Chairs meet every other Tuesday. We have a lot of committees. Like I'm the Chairman of the Education and Youth Employment Board. So I'm involved in working on areas for the youth such as the Youth Bill. This is where I really fit in cause it's helping get education and employment for youth at the same time. We have committees where people are responsible for public relations and fund raising and health.

Say for instance there's a rally for all youth, such things as drug prevention or anything like that down at a mall or a center. So we discuss the business of what are we going to do. Are we going to have a booth or have a little skit out there or something like that? Like, now we've never had an awards program for youth as far as who's the most active volunteer worker in the community. So we are trying to get it off the ground.

It's nothing like power. It's like we collaborate with each other. I've been there for two years. We get a a lot of publicity and it creates different avenues for me in my career. I want to be an architectural engineer. And I don't want to be a quitter. Everything is going right for me in this. Now I'm a member of the National Youth Coalition.

I'm on the National Committee for the Coalition for \$200 million. It's about renovating buildings for youth and also giving those who have dropped out of high school the opportunity to get their GED. It's all about making our country better, if teens really think about it, and are given the chance to get jobs, and then make themselves better.

This is why the youth are trying to get this going. And basically what we're trying to do is get up a plan and go lobby for it. Talk to the Congressman, or if we have to talk to their aides, get them to vote for our bill.

I really like this because it's getting something going that's on the ground. It's building and I like that...It's a real

challenge. I want to make it go so I can say, "yeah, I was part of that." Yeah, once I think about it I get this sort of glow.

Belonging to this says a lot for the youth. Because a lot of adults see the youth nowadays, especially black youth, in gangs and drugs. Youth in general are viewed in a negative light. Then in contrast they say we need to be behind our youth because they're our future. But they won't give us a chance because they say we're not old enough yet. But when are we old enough? So if there's some people who can do it at a young age and take leadership and be intellectually mature, then I think they should give us a chance.

It makes me feel good about myself. I think every young person should belong to a Youth Council. Not for the fact of political reasons or governmental reasons. Just the fact of learning responsibility and learning how to make decisions. It's like prep to make your own decisions. Important decisions. That's the main reason I would suggest that all youth join. It would help them to shape their lives to become someone. It can also give them an interest of what they want to belong to as far as international relations.

It has given me a chance to be in command, to learn how to be a leader. I've learned on my own. It's like I accepted the position without knowing how to handle it so I had to learn how to handle it fast 'cause they needed someone to be there. I had to learn fast to be a leader.

K. and W. were supportive, and it was like they kicked you from the backside out the door to get on your own, to learn how to do the

job by yourself. So they would go out there to speak, but they would say it's time for you to go out there and go on your own. And it was like they kicked you out there. You would have to mix it up and get it going. 'Cause a lot of youth are afraid of speaking, and I was too. I got over that in Washington D.C. I just made myself speak.

I see myself wanting to strive more to be at the top or to be successful. That's what it has given me, more inspiration to be successful in whatever I want to do. We as young people have to get our acts together. I know its tempting because I've been there. People are asking me to sell drugs because no one expects me to have any drugs. So even though the drugs bring you money it's all about your ideas, your morals. I can thank my father, but this is like another ironic thing. Because of my father having his habit I'm determined to stay away from any kind of connections with drugs. So because of my father being like that, that's what gives me the strength not to get involved with it. I feel blessed.

Carol's Story

Carol was a member of a Young People's Re-evaluation Counseling Class (co-counseling/RC) for the past 4 years. She is an only child of progressive, middle class, Jewish parents. Her parents were divorced when she was one and a half years old. She grew up in a very small town in Vermont, and when she was ten moved to Brookline, MA. The interview takes place at her father's house in Brookline. She was 16 at the time of the interview. Her story is in her own words, taken from the recording of the interview.

* * *

I really don't think I thought that much about stuff beyond myself. Because it was so intense what was going on right then that I just felt I would break if I just stepped outside of that at all. It was so concentrated right there...are they gonna like me...and it was too much to go beyond that. It was just that I really didn't like myself, and I was really constantly depressed with that all the time. And I get quick sparks of feeling, believing just because someone said, "Hi" to me or something. But it was very self involving or something because of the fact that that's all I placed importance on.

When I started getting this new group of friends, I remembered feeling so bad for myself all of the time because I was there, but I was definitely on the periphery. It wasn't like I was really accepted. I was continuously trying to prove something. I was just looking for acceptance. I wasn't receiving the support, and so I felt really bad.

Oh, I changed my name too. I was really on this normal trip and I was trying to be really really normal. My name is really way out. I found I was sort of having to look well put together when you wake up in the morning or you don't. I can't ever quite achieve it, and I just couldn't and I tried and I almost made it, but I never quite did it.

I moved to Brookline from Vermont, and that was really different in the fact that Vermont is much more of a working class state...and

it was entirely WASP, and so I was the only Jew in my class. There was one black family in the whole school system. I really always identified with minorities.

Often the fact that I didn't really do much work in school they thought I was a prodigy. They set me apart, so I felt I was really smart when the fact was it was just the school system which was pretty bad. I was a prodigy, and they were going to just let me do my own thing.

My parents were a lot more progressive than a lot of the other parents around; so I just remember the fact that I brought cottage cheese and cucumbers instead of bologna and wonder bread. You know I really felt set apart.

My mother was working and she was single. I had a very close friend in fourth grade. She lived in a little red house with a white picket fence and had a brother and sister and a daddy and mother. My friend, she was very nice; she was very small; she was very petite and well read; and I loved it. I worshipped her. I thought she was the most amazing creature that ever set foot on the earth. Because she was all the things that I wasn't. I thought I was really smart. I read alot for the age I was, and people would feel that I was smart. I was really accustomed to anger, I always had to wear big, klunker boots, and I didn't feel feminine. I was pretty violent, I would get mad. I would get very, very mad at my friend in the little red house. I lied alot. I would walk down the street, and I would just see somebody and I would tell this entire longwinded story, adding little things just to make it realistic; so nothing ever turned out

entirely correct. For no reason, I just wanted to do it. I wanted to be an actress. I was into drama. I was into like ego stuff.

I didn't suck up to adults but I could just talk to them with a lot more candor. I think it's just the way adultism is that you internalize the stuff so that you act dumber. I think that I just turned it around, and I kept acting smart. I kept acting like I was thinking so people responded to me in that way. I think I was more the exception rather than the norm.

A friend wanted me to speak with a peer counselor, and she told me a little bit about it. For some reason I decided to do it. And when I first did it, I was so silly about it. I sort of liked what I heard. It was just a very friendly group.

[At] Brookline High School, there is a Young People's counseling class. It focuses on a young people's committee, young constituency, and there's adults assisting, but it's essentially young people leading young people.

It's based on the theory everyone is born good and that when you're hurt you would relieve the hurt by some physical manifestation like crying, or shaking, or laughing, or screaming, which in terms of counseling as discharge. Over the years you are told that a lot of people confuse your discharging with your feelings. But its your old hurts. What often happens is adults try to stop you to make you feel better. A blatant example is with babies. Just how scared people are of having them cry. So as you do that, you're building up your hurts.

I think it was just that I was always feeling very emotional. I would always kind of cry a lot when something happened. Just someone would say something and I would just start to cry and I would always feel really bad about that. And I would get this weird feeling like every time I would start to do it. But in Co-counseling it was encouraged, not only was it encouraged, but I was singled out as this great counselor because I was doing it right. It was such a difference, such a bizarre phenomenon that I think I was really impressed by it.

It was so different from anything I had ever done before. There was hugging. It felt very community oriented. And I met a lot of people who I'm now really close with and it was fun. It was just such a side of me that I hadn't seen in a long time. I really loved it.

Our classes are about two hours and they are once a week. I'm the teacher. I enjoy people looking up to me. I have a lot of young people's classes just based on working on embarrassment, because there is so much embarrassment among young people. We deal with different topics, money, sexism, men's issues and women's issues. I work a lot with having young people take leadership themselves. I'll have someone else teach a part of a class. There's lots of closeness involved which helps people a lot I think. But it's essentially in a circle, and I just usually start where people go around and check in. Then I talk about theory a little bit and would counsel people in front of the group. Then people counsel each other separately.

I just think the theory is right on. That they had young people leading young people. I think it is totally necessary if there's going to be revolution, a movement, and that made me really feel a part of something. The fact that all this shit I'm feeling is "oh okay, there's a reason behind it", and it's oppression. That made me feel validated.

It's just that young people as a group are oppressed. There's no political power; there's no economic rights; you're not considered like full people. You can be committed to a mental institution by your parents until your 18. There's all these rules; you can't do this, you can't do that. Just because the fact that you are young.

Adulthood is where you are treated differently as if your thoughts aren't valid or you're not whole. You're becoming a woman, it's not like you're a woman. It doesn't matter where you are, but you should be taken seriously anyways. You're not allowed to do things or say things because of your age.

There's a large Co-counseling community and there's so many people out there. There is so many people to just refer to and talk to and get feedback from, and I feel so important in this. It's just the fact that there was a support system I think it helped me set up a support system for myself. And just felt cosmic, I was pushed to lead and once I did it, it was amazing how things fell into place. I feel I have a real grounding, a real basis in some important knowledge that is new and it's not something that a lot of people have thought about. So I have a new viewpoint, a very different

viewpoint and the fact that I'm able to share that just because it is so different starts a lot of people thinking, which is fun.

I think that Co-counseling is the only group that has really gotten people to be themselves, have themselves take themselves a lot more seriously than most other groups simply because it's their own thinking that's going on. The policy is constantly evolving; so it's if you want to change it do some thinking about it.

I feel very powerful and I feel very liked. I enjoy people looking up to me. I like giving out the theory to people. I like speaking my mind more than others. I like the fact that I'm making a difference.

I'm more politically active and I just think of things in a broader term. Like how it's going to fit in with my life and everyone else's life.

Mike's Story

Mike has been a member of a Re-evaluation Counseling Class at Brookline High School for the last two years. At the time of this interview he was 16 years old. Mike's main interest is folk dancing, he has been a dancer most of his life. Mike is from a white middle class family from Newton, MA. The interview takes place at Mike's family home in Newton. His story is in his own words, taken from the recording of the interview.

* * *

I didn't have a father until I was three. My real parents were never married and my mother married Dick when I was three. I met my

real father when I was about seven and I have a good relationship with both of them, with all three of them actually. My parents were great. I can't remember any period in my life where I didn't get along with my parents. My parent's, all three of them, have been folk dancers for a long time, so ever since I was a week old I've been doing folk dancing just about every week.

Folk dancing has given me an opportunity to be comfortable interacting with adults and sort of something that has always been constant in my life. I'm friends with the people at folk dancing and I guess that they're all adults is another good thing. It just gives me an opportunity to know people of different age ranges. I've pretty much always interacted well there. They treated me as an equal, and there wasn't any power structure.

Generally, I had a pretty negative impression of my peers. I had difficulty learning how to make myself socially acceptable with people my age. I would sort of assume that they wouldn't like me and that I had to do things to make them like me. Like I act certain ways or conform to a stereotype of how someone that age should act.

In middle school, it was in general a pretty negative experience for a long time. Well, all the kids picked on me. I wasn't comfortable with most of my teachers. I felt singled out by my teachers as a troublemaker I guess. I just felt like teachers were trying to be mean to me for no reason at all. I really felt a lack of individual attention from most of the teachers. I was well beyond what we were doing in class or I was just not interested in it. My

teachers had set plans, and I sort of had to fit into it I had to conform to it.

I was really scared of what my peers might think. It was like I was sort of giving them the power to judge me in a way. Because whether or not my peers liked me determined how my life at school was. I guess in ways I was probably really submissive and really trying to conform for a while. I was always trying different ways of dealing with people who were being openly hostile towards me. I just basically tried everything that I could have.

There are all these big things going on in the world that are beyond my reach and often beyond my understanding. It may be just because I'm not as informed about them or haven't made the effort to go out and read newspapers. Just the fact that a young person don't have as much of a social standing. It really feels like I can't do too much. Probably just sort of powerless to make much of a difference. I guess a lot of people feel that way, especially when they're younger.

I would have had support if I decided to take power, do something. I guess there was sort of an emphasis on, you know, you can change the world. You do have power, but I don't know, I didn't really see other people my age going out and doing things. I didn't really have any sort of example to follow.

I had a friend who basically told me that there was an introductory lecture on RC. I didn't realize that it had anything to do with like a class or a community. But he told me about it the day that the intro lecture was taking place. He said there would be

people talking about it, he explained a little bit of the theory, and about the whole thing about people getting hurt and discharge, and how we could basically work to make our lives better, and the world better. I had no idea it was a young people's group. I thought it was a formal lecture where there would maybe be a bunch of people taking notes and people in suits and ties standing up at the front of the room talking about the theory. And it was nothing like that. It was just a bunch of in people sitting in different places who were like the leaders and I thought it was great.

I had decided that it sounded like a good enough thing, that I should change my schedule at work and that was tough, but I managed to do it. I don't really know what turned me on to it right away so strongly. I guess a lot of it was just probably young people interacting in a caring sort of way, a non-competitive sort of thing. I'm tempted to say in an adult sort of way, but that's sort of the way that a lot of adults tend to act.

Most of the theory is that everyone is good. Everyone can do something to make their lives better and to be better, more caring about others and things. I think at first what attracted me was the fact that there would be people paying attention to me, but then it was more the opportunity for me to pay attention to other people.

We usually do things like come in and everyone would say, "I'm doing good." At first everyone would say their name. Then we'd usually have a class sort of a lecture-type genuine talk about some aspect of RC theory. Then maybe a demonstration and usually a 'mini' would come in somewhere. That's when we counsel each other.

I think a lot of RC theory sort of fits in with ideas I had myself before I knew anything about RC. It's been really good for me to know that there are other people out there that have beliefs that I think are good, are constructive--that everyone is good underneath their patterns. Of course I hadn't thought of this pattern, but basically that negative things about people are usually displaced by society or by them being hurt. I didn't know at first that it was at all tied in with liberation, and I guess it's good to sort of feel I can be a part of black people's liberation, young people's liberation. I guess maybe more than just changing me, it's made me more aware of things: that I have a lot of ideas in common with other people around and other people in RC that have the same ideas; that I could sort of talk to people about things on the same terms using RC terminology, it makes things easier (having a common language); and seeing the good things that people in RC are doing.

I felt a lot more comfortable just being myself then I would at school or something. I tend to interact with people in general better on a one-on-one basis, in really small groups. Trying to conform, to make myself attractive, I guess I don't do so much of that anymore--which is good. But I guess RC has been a big influence on me in that way. I don't have to make myself be someone different than what I am.

If I was in an okay environment I wouldn't be scared to cry. I never thought of it in these terms, but I guess I sort of did think of it as a healing process just because it's something that feels so

natural, it can't be all that bad. I mean healing is not a word that I would have associated with crying before RC.

I guess it's easier now to not be intimidated or influenced in negative ways by what adults say, what adults tell me to do, or tell me is right. I guess it's easier to take it as their opinion than take it as something that's true. Like if I am assuming that when I'm talking to say a teacher that we're talking as equals, then it make the situation be more like that than if I wasn't, even if the teacher isn't thinking on those terms.

Maybe my peers have a better sense of who I am. That's a major difference. I think I'm trying to interrupt oppression sometimes. In a group, if people are just talking negatively about someone who is not there, I try to do that sort of thing. I wouldn't have felt I had the power to do much before RC.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

Analysis of Their Stories

This study explores teen-agers' experiences as members of youth groups specifically designed to empower youth. The study focuses on the transformation that occurred in their lives through involvement with a youth group and identifies the factors that facilitated the process of empowerment. Common themes emerged from the interviews. These themes are: (1) adultism, (2) getting involved in a youth group, (3) adult leadership, (4) experience/exercise of power, (5) education and training (development of skills and critical analysis), (6) safety, closeness, and appreciation, (7) expression of opinions and emotions-conflict resolution, (8) acceptance of diversity, (9) developing a voice, (10) taking action, (11) philosophical assumptions, (12) organizational structure, (13) the youths' perceptions of the empowerment process, (14) impact on self-esteem: empowerment works.

This discussion of the findings is introduced with the youths' commentaries on their oppression--adultism. Their words present a clear, well-articulated analysis of the experience of adultism. The teens are expert in describing not only this oppressive situation, but also in defining what needs to happen in order for their empowerment to occur. Adultism is the pain from which rises young peoples' impetus to change.

In sharing their own process of growth and change through group involvement the youths identify the components that facilitated their empowerment. These fourteen factors build each upon the other in the lives of the teens studied. Each factor makes a critical contribution to the overall process of youth empowerment.

In this chapter, direct quotes from interviews are used to illustrate each theme. No changes were made in the words of the interviews, and every effort was made to preserve consistency with the context from which they were taken. While many commonalities among the young people were found and discussed, each has her/his own unique experience and individuality.

Adultism

Almost all the young people who participated in this study spoke of the disempowerment that they encountered when interacting with adults. By using the word adultism, thereby identifying a specific form of oppression, these youth could move beyond their initial feelings and further explore the dynamic of their disempowerment. All of the participants understood the essentially disempowering nature of adultism. Adultism influenced every aspect of their lives: their relationships with teachers, parents, peers, adults in general, and even their relationship with themselves. They spoke about how adults treated them, and how they felt about this treatment. Almost all teens attributed their feelings of self-hatred at least in part to the pernicious influence of adultism.

Susan strongly expresses the pains of adultism as being condescending and degrading, even if unintentional, on the part of most adults.

It's so degrading. It's just like they don't treat you like a human being because you are younger. They treat you like your ideas haven't fully developed yet. Like your pains don't matter. It's condescending. They're not perceiving you as a human being. You're not 18 and you're not 21 so you're not a magical adult, you're not on their level yet and therefore you have to be talked to like a little dog. "Come here now, ok, good" and I was already subjected to a lot of mature matters and I was like "Wait a minute, what are you talking about? I'm on the same level as you." People just don't seem to realize that they're hurting you. They think that they are speaking normally to you or whatever and being nice. And so I just wish that they would realize that they're actually thinking of you as not equal to them. People speak to you like you have to be reached down to on a different level, condescending, and that's the fastest way to alienate someone is to speak to them like they're not an equal person. I just get angry.

She goes on to talk about the impact adultism has on her self esteem.

You start thinking "why are all these people talking to me like this? Maybe I don't have a right to speak up like everyone else." When someone else doesn't perceive you as an equal to them then you start wondering why and then you think okay what did I do. It doesn't make you feel good at all, and you do start questioning your self worth. Well, after a while when a lot of people start doing that to you, you either question yourself and your own self worth or you question society. And most people question themselves, because society is all around. How are you suppose to question the norm when everybody does that to you? Well, I got to the point where I thought "well I'm obviously not worth it. Of course I'm not worth it. There's not question about it." And that's when I got

into being depressed and suicidal and not caring about things anymore. Not caring about the people I was with.

Theresa talks about how adultism has effected her family.

I got to say I still felt like pretty powerless and I mean people were running my life. People told me what to do and how to do it. Yeah, it was all adults, I couldn't deal with the adults. And I mean I tried several times, and I probably got beaten up more times than the normal person would because I was very outspoken and had like very strong convictions on who I was or what I wanted. And I guess my biological family didn't like that very much. I mean in a Hispanic family you're not suppose to really talk back and you're suppose to listen and you're suppose to do right in school and then come home and do the chores and take care of the family. And become this housemaid. And I wasn't very much into it.

When Theresa articulates one effect of adultism she links her feelings of powerlessness at home to her behavior at school.

And the only life I had I guess was in school and that was my second world. So instead of concentrating on school I concentrated on cutting classes and becoming this macho, not macho, but tough person because I guess I was so defenseless at home that I had to make it up while I was in school.

Mike's internalization of his feelings of powerlessness leave him unable to see himself as a functioning member of society.

Probably just sort of powerless to make much of a difference. I guess a lot of people feel that way. Especially when they're younger. A young person doesn't have as much of a social standing. It really feels like I can't do too much.

By not being intimidated by adults, Carol managed to avoid losing her confidence among them. However through her association with Re-

evaluation Counseling she is able to empathize with her peers. Carol defines adultism.

Just the way that they're treated differently as if their thoughts aren't valid or they're not whole. They haven't become. You're becoming a woman, it's not like you're a woman. It doesn't matter where you are, but you should be taken seriously anyways. You're not allowed to do things or say things. There's no political power. There's no economic rights. You're not considered like fully human. You can be committed to a mental institution by your parents until your 18. Like there's all these rules like you can't do this, you can't do this and why never gets answered.

Chris perceptively notes a connection between adultism and racism.

A lot of adults see the youth nowadays, especially Black youth...the only publicity blacks get are being in gangs and drugs, even though there's whites, Hispanics and all that. They eye youth in general in a negative light. They won't give us a chance because they say we're not old enough yet. But when are we old enough?

* * *

The young people in this study are leaders in understanding the nature of youth oppression because they articulate the problem, they speak out and they take action. These people are very clear about the negative messages that they receive from adult society. These messages make a significant impact on their self-worth and their image of who they are and what they can do in the world. Adultism affects all youth to some degree, although most are unfortunate enough to also be the victims of other social oppressions such as classism, ageism, and racism.

What is significant is that even though these youth feel oppressed, they are able to articulate their experience of disempowerment. Teens often aren't treated with respect, listened to or taken seriously, but as these interviews make clear, there is every reason that they should be.

Getting Involved in a Youth Group

All of the participants talked about how they got involved in the group. None were explicitly looking for a youth group. In all cases the participants became involved indirectly, such as through the membership of a friend or a personal challenge. Once the initial step was taken, they were enticed to stay by peer encouragement, positive reinforcement, the need to succeed, or a positive welcome.

Juan tells how he had been invited to a meeting by happenstance.

My changing point was when I was 14 years old and I met this guy who was the same age as myself and he invited me to come over to this place called the Youth Action Program where they had a youth patrol.

He also praises the willingness and commitment of the director to draw him out about how important his membership in the group is.

I remember the first meeting I went to. It was a meeting with about ten teen-agers and this lady, this white lady. I'm sitting down and she comes out. They're talking, she comes out and points at me and she says, "what's your name, where are you from, how do you feel about what was talked about in the meeting?" And I was like...I had this attitude that I said, "what do you care about what I think. It doesn't matter what I think." I told her my name and I just told her I felt [the meeting] was good and she used, I believe she used psychology on me from

when I told her I felt it was okay. She said, "can you explain more?" And little by little I started telling her how I felt.

Also for Juan this group experience was one of the few times where his presence was actually welcomed, and he could feel that people cared about him.

After the meeting went on, I got comfortable, they made all the young people feel comfortable and after that I would come in every day because the streets didn't have nothing for me. I used to come into Youth Action Program and used to speak with Dorothy. I used to get to know the staff there and the things that I loved about it, I remember this. But five years ago, I'll always remember this, everytime I used to go into Youth Action Program I was always welcomed by the adults that were working there. I was never exempt.

Theresa talks about knowing that knowledge, status, and the privileges of power make a difference, and about her realization that she needed to get involved.

I was hanging out at City Hall and this guy David started talking to me about the Coalition and what I could do and I was like yeah, yeah, yeah. Something else, somebody wants something from me. But then I met Dorothy. She came out and she was like "does anybody want to come inside City Hall and see what it looks like?" It was like going into the White House, but in New York. Dorothy was explaining to me about the budget process and what the program was about. And I saw this huge chair and it was like a king's chair. It was like really humongous and I sat on this chair and I'm like looking at all these people talking. And I just felt, like, power. It's hard to explain and stuff, but I guess that's when I know that my thing was politics. And that that's where you can make a difference in the world, with politics. And that sitting in that chair you can do a lot. And then after that I started becoming more involved and more involved.

Like Juan, Chris happened to be invited to a meeting by a friend with whom he had playful contests.

Well, we were going to different schools and he would call me. He was like, "I'm in a Youth Council now. Why don't you come down." I didn't come down the first year. Then one day I just went down to check it out.

But Chris being invited doesn't stand out for him as much as not be seen as a quitter, especially as a young black man.

Not quitting. It's just the fact just to excel. I don't want anyone to think I'm a quitter, so I guess that's the reason why I stayed.

For Mike the contradiction between his initial image of a dry, rigid Re-evaluation Counseling "lecture" and the warm, open environment he found when he arrived seemed to make a difference to his being able to join group.

I had a friend who told me about it. He really didn't explain it to me as RC. Or if he did I didn't understand. He told me basically that it was a lecture. He said people would be talking about things like people's hurts and discharge, [a process of releasing feelings] how we could basically work to make our lives better, and the world better. I thought it was just I would go and there would be sort of a formal lecture where there would maybe a bunch of people taking notes and like people in suits and ties standing up at the front of the room talking about the theory. And it was nothing like that. It was just a bunch of in people sitting around the room. Some of them were like the leaders and I thought it was great. I don't really know what turned me on to it right away so strongly. I guess a lot of it was just probably young people interacting in a caring sort of way and not a non-competitive sort of thing.

* * *

The experiences of the participants show that peer relations are crucial to adolescents, as youth have the power and knowledge to influence each other. Once the adult leaders have encouraged some teens to join, those members begin a chain reaction by getting friends and acquaintances to join too. Once in the group, the teens have a critical eye that enables them to assess the authenticity of the adults. Young people are not fooled. They generally have not only the ability but the need to cut through superficialities. They ask: Are the adults friendly and open minded? Do they make an effort to connect with the me? Are they committed to me? Will they love me even though I am having problems? Are they willing to share leadership? After the participants have assessed the adult leadership and the group members become acclimated, they begin to become more open and let down their defenses to let in love and caring that is being offered to them. In these ways, getting involved is one of the first crucial steps towards youth empowerment.

Adult Leadership

The particular qualities of the adult leaders were very important to these young people. They tell us about how they were struck by the leaders non-hierarchical power sharing and their genuine respect for the teens. To the youth in the groups, the adult leader was certainly not like the authorities they had encountered before. The effective leader believed in them and encouraged them to achieve their greatest potential. The power dynamic in the group was

non-hierarchical; that is, adult leadership was not defined by the power to make decisions, but rather by a mutual acknowledgment among members of a special status held by adults among equals. Just as important as this power dynamic is support of the leader in validating and appreciating the whole individual. None of the participants talks about the leader as someone who reinforces adultism. The relationship with the leader was significant in that she/he acted as a role model for healthy relationship. The adult leader was a person who had deep understanding of what empowerment meant when working with and loving youth.

Madeline's group leader was someone with whom she could talk and know that he would be there to encourage her to achieve her fullest potential.

Ed is number one, to this day I could just come in here and bring anything up with Ed. And for some reason Ed always knows what's going on with everyone before you think he knows. It's kinda scary but it helps. Ed pushes us to our potential, and at times we'd hate him for it. But afterwards it would make things so much different. I could feel the difference, and it was just all the different parts of the group blended together that made a big difference like that.

Susan talks about the role her adult leader plays as a guide and catalyst who stimulates participation of all.

She is so incredible. I'll have to talk about her. So she is the leader, but she, we always say Mary Ellen is not a teacher, but she is a guide. She sort of guides us this way or sets up our performances. We, the teens, make up the skits. Like in making up the skits we have her input, but she doesn't have more input than anybody else in the group. We all talk. We don't have to raise our hands, and she doesn't

call on us. She was an equal. You have as many ideas as she has. She doesn't play the authority bit with you. We always have meetings and we have group decisions. She never makes the decisions for us. She'll talk to you one-on-one and give you ideas, but she'll never tell you what to do or anything. She is just so supportive of you as a human being. It's amazing the difference. People immediately like her so much because she is just so one of us you could say. I don't feel like she is the enemy, like the adult enemy all around us.

Most important to Juan was when his group leader recognized him as a leader and empowered him by teaching the means of leadership.

My favorite out of all of them was the director 'cause she was the one who told me once she saw me and once I started talking the few days I was there, the few weeks I was there, she thought I was a true leader. So she took it upon herself to teach me leadership skills and to build up my self-esteem and my confidence in myself.

Mike expresses how his leader encouraged the members to take leadership.

She really doesn't try to limit her role to that of being a teacher. She'll have mini's with us...She also encourages us to lead sometimes...She feels like, if anything, more a part of the group. Her strongest point is probably encouraging young people to take leadership.

Chris' leaders were supportive and pushed him to be a leader.

Kevin and Wayne, they were supportive, and it was like they kicked you from the backside out the door to get on your own. To learn how to do the job yourself. They would say it's time for you to go out there and go on your own. And it was like they kicked you out there. You would have to mix it up and get it going 'Cause a lot of youth are afraid of speaking, and I was too, but they got me going.

* * *

The young people felt that the adult leaders were non-hierarchical, treated the youth as equals, and shared the power with them in every aspect of the group. The adults didn't take responsibility to act for the youth but rather encouraged them to act for themselves. Unafraid to share critical information with them, adults let the youth create the kind of environment that would speak to their own needs.

Although, the literature is limited in recognizing the importance of the adults leadership in youth groups, a few theorists (e.g., Keiffer) note the importance of role models to achieve empowerment. The teens in the study confirm that the adults are an excellent example of allies for youth, in addition to being catalysts for change in their lives. The teens go beyond what is in the literature to add that how the adults facilitate the group is also important. The participants recognized how the adults accept them totally, are non-authoritarian and share power with them.

Experience/Exercise of Power

The participants all talked about having the chance to share power, to take leadership, and to be a role model for other youth in the program. In most groups leadership was shared with the adult group leader, although some of the groups were lead only by a young person. Youth exercised real control of the organization--hiring and firing, teaching classes, providing role models and guidance--encouraged and supported by staff in both structural and informal

ways. Sharing power in these ways developed the youths' competency and leadership.

Theresa, assumed leadership in the hiring and firing of adult staff.

The youth govern this place. We hire the staff and fire the staff. We have input on everything that goes on in this place.

This is how she saw herself.

My role is more of a leader, young people looked up to me, and I would help them in their situations.

For Chris, learning leadership skills helped him to envision a career.

That's what Youth Council has done. It has given me a chance to be in command. To learn how to be a leader and as far as architecture engineering, which is what I want to get into, that's what it help me to focus on.

Carol talks about leadership as being a cosmic experience.

I think I was very encouraged. The counseling theory is that anyone can take leadership, which I think is a really right on theory, and so I did it. And I just felt like cosmic, I was just like pushed to lead, and once I did it was amazing how things fell into place.

Also Carol, comfortable with her own leadership, is able to share it with others.

I work alot with having young people take leadership themselves so it's not just me. Like I'll have someone else teach a part of the class and when someone asks a question, having them think it out as opposed to me just answering it. We don't really do any like advice in the class. It is much more.

* * *

For young people, the exercise of power in leadership roles is a direct outgrowth of the models presented by adult leaders and of the organizational norms. As seen in the preceding section, these models teach a non-oppressive approach to the distribution of power in an organization. This is understood by the youth in their own psyche and implemented in their interactions with others, both on an individual and a group level. This process has a number of positive consequences. Youth take on responsibilities, grow in confidence and self-esteem, and feel powerful and capable to effect change in their own lives and in the world.

The youth empowerment literature discusses youth leadership (Kielsmeier, 1988) or "partnership" (NCRY, 1982) but does not refer to the concept of power and its role in liberation. A sense of ones' own and collective power is a critical factor in the development of personal potential for empowerment. The exercise of power casts the future in a very different light. Youth take responsibility for shaping it.

Education and Training Development of Skills and Critical Analysis

All the young people appreciated how the education and training they received increased their knowledge and built their confidence. The education and training component offered the youth two ways to develop skills. First, the training enabled them to develop their interpersonal skills such as communicating, being responsible and respecting others. Second, they obtained such task-oriented skills

as budgeting, hiring, working on committees and developing policies. As well as specific skills, youth also gained information which helped facilitated the development of a critical analysis.

For example, Juan discusses how he personally grew in two ways: he pointed out that he learned interpersonal skills and budget development and management.

What I liked best about Youth Action was the Policy Committee because I was in the Policy Committee for three years. And that was a wonderful experience. That was my real changing point in terms of me being educated, knowing how to express myself, how to talk, how to listen to other people, how to respect other people and their opinions. It was a wonderful experience.

The Policy Committee taught me and taught the others how to make up a budget. I mean we were dealing with \$400,000 or \$500,000 that were given to us by foundations, private agencies and city and state governments. And we would sit down, we would sit for 3 days in a row, three hours a day. We would sit down, and the director would go over with us the budget. We would look over every department, and we would make sure the departments were not spending a lot of money in the budget. We did everything.

For Susan the training gave her a mature, responsible understanding of topics that are not usually available to young people.

Well in training at Teen Rap Line we deal with issues we were going to get on the Rap Line. People are going to call up with problems and basically in form of abuse, or suicide and depression. All deal with oppression in one sense or another. We have been trained about forty hours in every subject that we can think of. We never give advice. Never. It's one of these big No No.

Chris prepared himself for the future by learning the importance of making decisions.

I think every young person should belong to a Youth Council. Not for the fact of political reasons or governmental reasons. Just the fact of learning responsibility and learning how to make...It's like a prep to making your own decisions. Important decisions. That's the main reason I would suggest that all youth join. It would help them to shape their lives to become someone.

Martin contrasts the communication skills of members of Children of War with those of his friends.

There's a different feel because we're closer. Not because I love Children of War members any more than I love my friends, but my friends have less of an ear for what I want to talk about. See, Children of War is 'speak what you feel.' And another key thing is everyone learns to listen really well to everyone--Listen to how people feel and just really listen. You have to show people that want to talk that you're listening to them. And if you don't understand something you bring that up, and people try to explain things to you. While with friends it's easy for them to shut themselves off and things that like that because friends can do that between themselves. It's different. There's isn't a real working to try to improve things all the time. It's kind of like family.

Juan realizes that society is skeptical about the abilities of young people to learn adult skills.

It feels like I make really a difference in the world if I was interviewing someone for a position. A lot of people would say, "Jesus Christ that guy is a crazy." You have these teen-agers here who have not completed high school yet, have no kind of experience of the real world, interviewing an adult person who has been through college, has gotten their Master's degree who has been in other jobs, and their career depends on these young people. That is crazy. And we have proven a lot of people wrong. The young people who are in this policy committee, we go through a six month training where we train them how to interview a person and the skills to look for. How to read and

understand all kinds of resumes. How to get the reference. How to run a budget crisis. How to make up a budget in the program. It's like a mayor running a city.

* * *

The assumption of these organizations is that these young people are able to accomplish anything as long as they are well prepared. The skills offered to them by the organization increase their potential in the world. Education and skill training enables the young people to develop the confidence necessary to assume leadership roles. Because the teens are trained in interpersonal skills, they are able to take on large responsibilities. Training and education lay the foundation for youth to act in these ways. Empowerment is then a result of their accomplishments in roles otherwise believed to be beyond their abilities.

In addition to conveying concrete skills, the education process provides youth with socio-political information. From this information they develop a critical analysis which enables the young people to develop opinions and assume responsible roles in society.

For Juan, this process has prompted him to pursue information, assess it's implications and form opinions.

Yeah, now I have opinions. Now I know what kind of world I live in. I know about the presidents. I know about Ronald Reagan. What a terrible guy he was on the issues of power for minority inner-city people. Him cutting programs, cutting medicaid--It was really bad. I started doing a lot of reading, picking up newspapers, reading about events. And I began to understand more.

As she gained information, naivete was dispelled for Madeline.

I became more informed in the world and even in Madison as a community. I learned more about myself in relationship to the world around me. Just by talking about it and getting a new view and things like that. It really helped me to see things in a different way.

* * *

The relationship between education and power is articulated by Paulo Freire in his discussion of the empowerment of Brazilian peasants through literacy training (Freire, 1984). According to Freire, when a subordinate group acquires information they gain independence from the dominant group. Using that information to act, they assume control of their own lives. Similarly, the teens' education and training gives them the opportunity to make important decisions, to learn interpersonal skills, to see with a broader vision: to take control of their lives.

Safety, Closeness and Appreciation

For the youth in this study a feeling of a "safe place" was essential and was fostered by the non-judgmental attitudes, support and encouragement of staff and peers. A safe environment is one in which teens share feelings, thoughts, and ideas openly and honestly. The youth groups offer somewhere to get off the street, to hang out and to grow. In the groups, youths feel validated and appreciated for who they are. This feeling of being appreciated is a significant factor in enhancing self-esteem. Trust and friendship grow and bonding occurs through specific exercises, for example, appreciation circles and massage. These are critical elements in the development of positive relationships.

Susan can be herself, without risk of judgment or criticism.

If I need to get out of the house and I need a place to go and even if I don't want to talk about anything or if I really want to do something I can go there and sit there and just be there. And it's some place to go, it's some place to be, some place no matter what I'm wearing, what I look like, what I act like, I can be totally insane and I can be totally dead and morose and morbid. I'm accepted there. And that's what's amazing. It's really good for me. Good for everyone.

Theresa talks about a safe environment as being a welcoming place, one where teens get needed attention. There is no pressure. Staff gently and consistently encouraged her to participate at her own pace.

When I came here I was still upset and still didn't trust anybody. I was still sheltered and I tried to commit suicide. But it's like they didn't rush me. They didn't kick me out. They didn't hover over me so fast. They didn't protect me so fast. They let me go at my own pace and they let me experience what I had to experience and to build a bond. They allowed me to feel out the place. And if I didn't come one day to a meeting they would call the house and say, "Well what happened? We missed you." And I would say, "Well I didn't want to come." And they were like, "Well we feel that you have important input."

Madeline experiences a bond with the group, as "one big power," which forges a lasting connection.

The first play we had opening night...two minutes we were going to be on stage, when everyone stood in the circle we all held hands and Ed just told us this is it. We got to do it, and I mean everyone was so nervous, but we all held hands and we sent our individual power through everyone just to make it one big power, and we could feel everyone's presence. No matter where we were anytime, I mean, it helps so much I still feel like I have that with the bond. The

way everyone is I can just call anyone up anytime. I think that the people in the group are the kind of friends that I have always been looking for where if I needed someone I can call them. It could be Ed, or anyone else, I could call them at 2:00 in the morning and they will be there for me. That's the one thing that stands out, and it all happened that one night. I think that's when everything just kicked in the magic.

The environment these youth describe is not a fortuitous occurrence. It is a consequence of consciously created norms that not only value closeness and safety but teach them in concrete activities.

Madeline described the specific activities, which often involved touch, that built trust and closeness.

We would become a part of each other through trust exercises lifting everyone up in the air. We would do different trust exercises that you would really do with others. And we had to lay on the floor where you were touching someone by the upper part of your body and then someone would be laying on your lower part you know like a chain, we had to do that, bonding like that. We massaged each others backs--different things--it was something that made us all closer so when the time came for the play we where all together and felt like a group like one person.

For Juan, appreciation of each other helped to create a positive atmosphere.

One thing good that we always did, we never missed this at all, was we would appreciate each other at the end of the meeting. Everyone would have a turn appreciating the one to your left or the one to your right. Even if we had a hard, stressed meeting we would appreciate each other at the end of the meeting. And that was real important because in the world and in society you are not appreciated very much. You only hear the negative about yourself. You don't hear the

positive. No one appreciates you a lot. But at the Youth Action Program appreciation was one of the top.

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A safe environment for these youth reflects positive human interaction: a lack of criticism; a feeling of welcome; an acceptance of individual needs; a feeling of appreciation. Some of the ways it is conveyed are through positive physical touch, persistent contact to encourage participation, and explicit expression of appreciation. Appreciation is energetic and active affirmation that conveys loving nurturance. Youth who have learned to receive affirmation, in turn, are able to give it to others. The environment of a group is clearly felt and is an essential aspect of the empowerment process. Closeness, appreciation, and trust are for the youth, a direct result of a safe environment.

The concepts of safe environment, closeness and appreciation are not identified in the literature in the field of youth empowerment. Despite this gap, the young people interviewed repeatedly emphasized their importance. In order for them to overcome the limits of adultism and grow as powerful youth leadership, closeness and a safe environment were necessary.

Expression of Opinions and Emotions Conflict Resolutions

The honest expression of opinions and emotions in a supportive, safe setting represented a radical change for these young people. For many, this was the first such opportunity, and they experienced a positive impact on their self-esteem. As a consequence, the youth

grew to respect their own and others' opinions and emotions and learned appropriate ways to respond to conflict.

For Susan, when her opinions were respected, she was able to develop a positive sense of herself.

Brairpatch they consider you as a human being. They consider your opinions, so you feel like you have a right to your opinions. So you start having your opinion, you start forming them, and you start acting upon them.

Juan felt secure in the knowledge that a range of opinions were welcome.

And at Youth Action Program the atmosphere is that you can say whatever you think. Whatever is on your mind without no one going against you, without no one going against your opinion. Everyone is entitled to their own opinions.

As Martin stated, the expression of a full range of emotions made it possible for him to feel really accepted.

I can talk to Children of War members about how I feel, about fears, about hopes, about dreams and things like that. Nothing is not spoken about. There's nothing that anyone can't speak about. I mean the issues, the pains, everything.

The support group provides Juan the opportunity to express his feelings.

A lot of times I got my frustrations out in the support groups. And you need a support system like that. We all need someone to listen to yourself and let out all the frustration that you have.

Madeline described a healthy process of using the group at Ebony Expressions to "talk," to verbally work through arguments.

Yea, we would meet two to three times a week. If there would be any problems with a

student we would talk about it. If two people where having a argument we would sit and talk about it. If everyone was arguing we would talk about it.

Several interviewees had a history of violence, suicide attempts and criminal charges. The youth groups provided a healthy alternative to these predominantly violent means of dealing with conflict. The youth developed a range of ideas and feelings, positive and negative, and expressed them in constructive ways.

Dealing with conflict in appropriate ways is key to youth empowerment. For the young people interviewed it was critical that engaging in conflict, with peers or with adults, took place in a context of shared power. Not only was there no risk of punishment for the expression of differences, the youth were also listened to and believed in. They learned that their thoughts and feelings were appreciated, understood and even had power to affect outcomes. This knowledge, combined with their experience in exercising power within the organization, enabled them to use new ways of resolving conflict.

Madeline realized that she could openly express herself with adults and not suffer negative consequences.

When we'd have arguments with Ed in the group and at first when I'd see people yelling at Ed, I was like, "Oh my goodness, what are they doing? They're yelling at this man and he's gonna go crazy." But he wouldn't go crazy, he'd yell back. And then the next day we'd still be in the group and the student would still be in the group and I was like, "Wow, how can this be?" And I started to realize that I could be like that with other people with other adults. I can sit down and talk to them or yell. I wasn't so much scared or afraid of adults as I was before. I saw a new side of them where they were actually human beings instead of just the older people.

The structure of the organization redefined the power structure so that "subordinates" are full and equal participants. Theresa realized that her voice, her truth, would be listened to and believed in.

I was the first woman on the the construction crew. There were a lot of obstacles to overcome. The site manager took a shining to me and he liked me. Some stuff happened. I went to my counselor and I told her about it. Then we had this huge meeting and I believed that they would believe him. Then the board was brought in and then he was fired. I couldn't believe it. I'm like, "These people really do listen to me! I mean it's finally justice." For me it was finally justice that this man didn't get away with what he did. Ever since then I started believing in the program. And I joined the policy committee and became very vocal.

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In the context of a safe, structured environment, youth developed and practiced skills in self expression and conflict resolution. But the process does not stop there. These new skills also carry over into all aspects of their lives--school, home, the streets. While the literature makes reference to the importance of young people expressing opinions, there is no reference to healthy sharing of emotions nor to dealing with conflict. This research shows it to be very significant for young peoples' empowerment.

Acceptance of Diversity

In the youth's experiences, all teen-agers were accepted and valued regardless of personal history, family or ethnic background. Once a young person felt personally appreciated in their uniqueness, they were then able to extend the same appreciation to others.

Martin experienced the unity of a diverse group as signaling "a real time of change" and as validating the work that he wants to do.

I remember one time we were all in an apartment in Brookline and we were talking about like never in a million years has it been that a Haitian, a Cambodian, a South African, a Jew, an Anglo Saxon, all these different people were all sitting in the same room talking about the same things, agreeing about it. It like never happened in the history of the world. And just knowing things like that I felt like for myself maybe it's a real time of change. I felt like there was something going on. I don't know for sure if it's going to make a difference, but as long as I know we're working towards it, makes me feel clear inside. That's what Children of War has done for me, and that way it has helped me in my whole life as a whole because I feel like I'm only doing things that I want to do now. That I really believe in.

Brairpatch provided Susan with an open, non-judgmental context in which to learn and develop her identity. She also learned to avoid stereotyping others.

I think that Brairpatch just allowed me to become the person that I need to be, that I wanted to be and they didn't give me ideas, they didn't force on me opinions or anything. They just--we operate under the idea that being open about things. I try to be open about things. I try not to label people, I try not to make judgments, I try not to generalize or stereotype.

Susan felt the groups members' acceptance of her, and learned the skills necessary to maintain an open atmosphere of support.

Well I started being accepted. At Teen Rap Line we are accepting. People know that my father is gay and they still liked me. You can talk to them. You get support from them. For the teen-agers they want to help people. They're able to listen well, they're open to ideas. In order to be accepted on Teen Rap Line you have to be able to put your own feelings aside and be able to talk objectively and be open about things. So

everyone on the line will like you no matter what you're like or what you do.

Madeline describes her group's assessment of discrimination.

We talked about everything and how discrimination against other minorities is crazy and terrible.

* * *

The youth in this study clearly articulate the personal benefits derived from feeling welcomed and accepted: increased self esteem, confidence in their beliefs, etc. From their words, it may be concluded that an acceptance of diversity affects not only individual youth but that they in turn perpetuate it in all aspects of their lives.

For the young people, acceptance and appreciaiton of diversity are both causes and consequences of empowerment. For some, as for Martin, it was a life-changing experience. Once again, the youth in this study are the experts, identifying an important concept which is not referred to in the youth empowerment literature.

Developing a Voice

Learning how to develop a voice was critical for the youths. It was important for them to be able to speak up and be listened to in order to feel believed in and acknowledged as important, contributing members of society. The organization facilitated a range of activities which fostered self-expression.

Susan experienced a sense of pride in being able to help others by communicating with them. She felt happy that she could be useful to others.

Having a voice and knowing that after my day is done someone else feels better because of me and that whether it's the person that I talked to on the phone or whether it's the person at Teen Rap Line or the person in JABONGGIT that was feeling bad that day or feeling happy, I was there to share their happiness with them.

For Theresa, having a voice gives her a sense of being powerful.

The belief that no matter what you say it's important. That you have a voice. And that you have something powerful to say.

Martin gets a sense of purpose by being able to teach about the concept of peace that Children of War tries to convey to people.

They know what's real, but to like actually move it from your head to your hands and actually go out and teach people--that's what Children of War did for me because it gave me a place where I could talk to people, and that's the ingredient because that's like life's purpose. Life's purpose is doing what you believe, and Children of War does that for kids because it answers questions.

Theresa was able to use her experience to educate others.

They would make me feel important so I would come the following week. Then I started, like, speaking to other youth people and speaking to adults and they're like wow, wow, I could be collecting welfare. And you can just basically be useless or you can use experience in what happens to you to benefit other young people and to benefit social workers and teachers and to show them that they're not doing the best things for young people. And you can teach them what it was like for you to grow up in a group home and what you wanted. You can do speaking engagements.

* * *

As youth learn to speak out, they develop a sense of pride, of power and of purpose. Articulating and expressing their belief is an empowering process. The youth empowerment literature does not

discuss the need for young people to develop a voice. It does not recognize that a key aspect of empowerment is the feeling of having something to say and having the authority to say it. The result of having such a voice is that teens feel that they can take action and make a difference in society.

Taking Action

One result of the empowerment of individual youth was their involvement in collective social change efforts in their communities or youth groups. The teens went from being largely apolitical to deep engagement in social action, with greatly expanded vision and understanding of racism, homelessness, and other social issues. They all had the opportunity to see themselves in roles that they had never before thought possible. They went from feeling victimized to becoming leaders.

Theresa tries to open the door for other young people to get involved in programs that will help them. She is an organizer and a spokesperson for youth issues on a local and national level.

What I do is organize young people to make political or social change. I try and open their eyes to not just see Harlem but the world around them and show them that it doesn't have to be this way and that they have a voice and that they are the future.

I've been on talk radio presentations. I've gone to different conferences around the U.S. speaking on youth issues and youth action...and I've been to the Capital Hill and testified on the racism that's in school. I've been to three countries and on a lot of panels on youth issues on foster care and on abused children.

Susan can feel that she made a difference in someone's life by answering the Rap Line. This enables her to realize that making a difference can be carried over to other issues.

I feel that when you come home and you say, "Whoo, I made a difference today in somebody's life." And you come home most every day saying that. You're like, wow, I can make a difference, and you just renew your efforts to do that. Now if I see something maybe I will go to a rally or I'll march with someone, or I'll give money or I'll make phone calls.

Juan takes action to the streets. He is involved in issues regarding the discrimination against black and hispanic teen-agers.

I expressed my opinions on racism and discrimination, especially in New York City. We go to youth rallies, AIDS rallies, speak-outs on the issues that affect black and hispanic teen-agers, discrimination because of race, color, because of sex. We speak out on budget cuts that they do on youth services.

Chris talks about how he has expanded his thinking and, thus, become more politically active.

Yeah, I think a lot more about things as a whole and how it fits in. I'm more politically active and I just think of things like in a broader term, like how it's going to fit in with my life and everyone else's life in general as opposed to right now, right this minute.

Mike feels now he can try to interrupt oppressive statements that people make.

I think I'm trying to interrupt oppression sometimes. In a group, if people are just talking negatively about someone who is not there, I try to do that sort of thing. I wouldn't have felt I had the power to do much before R.C.

Chris talks about the Youth Bill and the feelings he has about being a part of a powerful national youth project.

The Youth Bill is for \$200 million. We're trying to get this going. We talk to the congressman, or if we have to, talk to their aides to get them to vote for our bill.

It's about renovating buildings and also helping those who have dropped out of high school to get their equivalency, GED. It's all about making our country better. If they really think about it, it gives them a chance to get jobs. And then they can make themselves better and then there won't be such a high unemployment rate.

It was just getting something going that's on the ground. It's building and I like that. It's a real challenge. I want to make it go so I can say, yeah, I was part of that. I helped it to get going.

For Carol taking action by teaching others Re-evaluation theory makes her feel good about herself and helps to realize she is making a difference.

Yeah, I enjoy people looking up to me. I mean I'm teaching in class. I'm the teacher. I like giving out the theory to people. I like the fact that I'm making a difference.

For Martin, taking action means speaking to high school students about the connections between war and prejudice.

You wouldn't know it from looking at her. You wouldn't know the story at all behind the face when Rong spoke about her experience in Cambodia. These high school students who are listening are the same people who would yell at her and say stupid things to her on the street or just assume this or that because they don't know anything. They don't know any better. But through the sharing of Children of War they get to understand her as a person--her pain. They get to understand that it's a real human issue, this war and this hatred thing, and that just like Rong left her country to come to this country, we as individuals have to try to solve the problems for ourselves and for everyone else at the same time. We try to do our part by going into the high school and talking with the students.

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The youth in this study have come through a process of transformation and are no longer the same. They are in leadership roles, making a difference and making change. The youth empowerment programs have guided the transition. Each of the components previously discussed--education and training, the adult leader, developing a voice, exercising power, etc.--have built a foundation from which strong, competent youth can take on their world.

The youth empowerment literature confirms what youth in this study assert about the need to take action (NCRY, 1982). A piece missing from the literature which is articulated by the interviewees in this study is the importance of giving youth the tools to develop critical analysis and the opportunity to choose to work on issues important to them. In Chris' words, "I think a lot more about things as a whole and how it fits in."

Philosophical Assumptions

For most of the young people in this study the underlying philosophical assumptions of the organizations were a critical component in guiding them to their own personal empowerment.

The following beliefs about human needs are implicit in the philosophical assumption of the youth empowerment organizations. People grapple with the question of identity "Who am I?" There is a need to belong; to be or act in relationship to others. Respect for ones self and others is fundatmental. People seek meaningul service, and collaboration with others to better the world. Furthermore,

organizational beliefs were a key ingredient in the overall success of the groups in giving the youth their new found belief that "young people make a difference in the world."

Juan states that the organization was totally committed to youth empowerment in every way.

Their philosophy is that young people make a difference in the world. Young people are our future. Young people are the adults coming up in the future who will be running this world. Of course the world and society doesn't look at it that way. But YAP's philosophy is the young people can make a difference. Young people need to be heard. Young people need to be taken seriously. Young people need to be respected. They need to be heard because in society they don't let you say what you feel.

For Susan, Brairpatch's approach was not to give advice, but just to guide young people when they need help.

You don't give advice because Brairpatch, the whole agency, operates under the policy that the philosophy is that people can help themselves. Sometimes we just need a little help or they need someone to talk to to help straighten out their feelings.

Madeline describes how the program was started to overcome the stereotypes of black youth held by society and to give them a means of empowerment.

One of the reasons Ed started the program was that he wanted to show people that we had more to offer than just hanging out with our friends and doing bad in school as the stereotype of black teen-agers is doing drugs and getting pregnant.

Part of the name is Ebony Expressions Cultural Awareness Project. It's to make people aware of how teen-agers feel about today's issues. People don't really think about how we feel and that we have opinions about things. And we sure

do have a lot to say and that's what Ebony Expressions is about.

* * *

Youth in this study identify some of the important philosophical beliefs: that youth need to be heard, taken seriously and respected; that they "...sure do have a lot to say" about contemporary issues. These beliefs must include an analysis of the nature of human needs. The organization must hold a strong conviction that its goal is youth empowerment; in order to be successful, this must permeate all program components. Despite the critical impact that philosophy has on the organizations' success in empowering youth, this fact is not recognized in the literature of youth empowerment.

Organizational Structure

However, philosophy is only a fundamental first step towards success. These beliefs must be implemented in consistent organizational structures such as regular meetings and support groups. All such structured gatherings or tasks are characterized by the themes previously discusses: shared power, conflict resolution, acceptance of diversity, etc. The teens spoke about various group structures but certain ones were consistently identified, such as regular gatherings, business meetings, support groups, theater arts sessions.

Juan said that his support group enabled him to realize that others cared about him.

We have support groups which was one of the philosophies of Youth Action program. We were like brothers and sisters. When we would do

support groups we would hold each other's hands. Support groups where there would be five to six young people and everything in the group would be confidential. And in that group everyone would have 10-15 minutes to themselves to talk about anything they want without being questioned, without being stopped, without being interrupted and just sit there and be listened to, get the eye contact, show that we care about how we feel about each other.

Mike describes the format of the meetings.

We usually do things like...well we'd come in, and everyone would say how they are they doing. At first everyone would say their name. Then we'd usually have a sort of lecture-type genuine talk about some aspect of RC theory. Then maybe a demonstration [of the counseling model in action]. And usually a mini [peer counseling] would come in somewhere. Occasionally we would play games.

Martin notes that the Children of War has three parts to their meetings: support groups, organizational business, and educational sessions. He feels that the overall feeling of the group is one of closeness, much like a positive family environment.

Basically, we start up with support groups. Everyone will break up into different groups, and we share with one another how our week's been and what we've been going through. Then after that we get into the major groups and we just organize as far as like the next speaking engagement, what were are going to do. Then we give presentations on whatever country that we're from and what are issues that really touches their hearts. And we learn a lot of things from each other. We just get together and we're socializing. You're always meeting people. It's just like really close. After a certain point it's like a real kind of family. Close, close, friends kind of environment situation.

For Juan the Youth Action Program provided a structure for his life, and a kindly connection with others.

Everyday there are meetings. Everyday there was something to do at YAP, whether it was to paint the building anyway we want to, whether it was to have a meeting about the kind of equipment we want, what we want to do with the program. Everyday there was something to do.

And just having a lot of other young people and peers around. Just being friendly and not acting selfish and defensive and or acting mean. The whole atmosphere on that place was so good.

Carol talks about how physically close everyone felt to each other.

Well it's just there's a lot of physical contact and there's a lot of closeness involved which helps a lot, I think. But it's essentially in a circle and I just usually start with an opening where people just go around and just say anything.

* * *

The structures of the organizations provide a framework that encourages teens to come together personally, culturally, and for organizational activities. This framework grows out of genuine caring and simultaneously permits caring to flourish. Without that, empowerment cannot truly happen.

Historically, structures, have been used to impose power over youth, as is seen in traditional school systems which strictly limit youths involvement in shaping the institution. The empowerment organizations in this study use a different model, one built on a conception of "power with," that is, cooperative action to increase personal and group shared power (Kriesberg, 1986). Chris makes this distinction when he says, "It's nothing like power [over]. It's like we collaborate with each other."

The Youths' Perception of the Empowerment Process

After experiencing the programs, the young people were able to discuss the process of empowerment. What follows, in their own voice, is the teens definitions of and advice to adults on the empowerment process.

For instance, Martin emphasizes the importance of inner strength as well as the need for support from others.

Empowerment is the realization of inner strength, is the realization of the strengths within a person or being that have always been there but may have been lying dormant because of preconceptions that the person has had upon themselves as far as thinking that they didn't or couldn't do something. And then suddenly realizing that they can, and they always had the power, and that all they had to do was believe that they had it, and they could use it for their benefit. That's what empowerment is.

Also the realization is acquired through the lifting up of a person by other people, through education and sharing and pushing people to speak what they feel and bring all things out I think that causes empowerment too. Because when there's nothing that you can't say, when there's nothing that you can't feel and express, then you're free.

Theresa believes that teens having a voice in their own affairs is important.

Allowing everyone to have a voice on every issue. It's a program allowing teens to speak on the budget or what types of programs that they want to see in their community, in their schools. What I envision, I guess, in the future is that there will be a youth council on every city agency level with the with the board of education with HRA with youth services with the department of youth services. I want the Mayor to have a task forces with young people, and not just to give their opinions but also to come up with some solutions to those problems and take them up.

Not just listen to them, but to take them seriously and act on the things that the young people are saying.

For Mike, empowerment was:

I think being comfortable with yourself and what you're capable of doing. I suppose everyone does have a certain amount of power, and it's realizing it more than gaining it. Realizing that you have power to use than finding a way to get power. And also realizing that you can misdirect power to hurt people.

* * *

As Martin summarizes, "Empowerment is the realization of inner strength,...the strength within a person or being that have always been there but may have been lying dormant." The empowerment group serves as a vehicle to awaken and develop this inner strength. The group and the individual interact in a process in which youth discover their power, increase their skills, apply their knowledge in powerful collaborative efforts that serve their communities and enhance their self esteem.

Youth on the Facilitation of Empowerment

Youth discuss the roles adults can play as catalysts for their process of self empowerment. They also have a critical message for adults: adults do not give power to youth, but rather facilitate youth's development of their own power.

Martin's message to adults is to take the teens seriously.

Don't limit us, don't pretend that we're that simple. We're complicated individuals who are dealing with real problems. Don't weight the severity of my problems, of the seriousness of your adults problems; my pain, my problems, my issues are just as severe, just as important to

me, they affect me just as deeply as any of your world or any of your world-shattering issues that you're dealing with in your life. Don't downplay how I feel or what I'm going through because some how I'm less important because I'm younger. Don't cut me down. Don't make me that simple. Don't make me feel small. Don't limit me. Don't pretend that because I am child because I am young, I don't think about important issues. That I don't have a say in important issues. That I am unrealistic about what needs to be done. Educate me about what the facts are and I'll give you the right answers. I don't need to be a certain age to be able to do that. That's the message to everyone.

Chris tells adults that youth only need to be given a chance.

I would say get behind the youth and listen to them. So give us a chance. We're going to make mistakes. Adults make mistakes too. Just

give us a chance. The mistakes that adults make we can learn from. Tell them to share that with us so we can take notes from that.

Theresa advises that adults must realize

...that young people are people and it's their life. You have to let them become involved in it because you're sheltering them and you're making these decisions that sometimes aren't the right ones.

Susan expands on Theresa's theme.

Don't run the youth group. Let the youth group run itself with you as an equal would be the thing, because everyone should have an equal say in it. And I guess the bottom line is treat others as equals no matter what their ages, whether they're 99 or they're two years old. They might not have as much or they might not have lived as long, but they're just as human as you are, and they have as many opinions and ideas and they have the right to respect them as you do. That is what it's all about.

* * *

The teens statements on empowerment speak for themselves; they know best what works for them, they know what others need to do to help them achieve it. Moreover they are the real experts; they emphasize that as "subordinates" they, along with the dominant group, should have a voice in developing their empowerment process.

Testimony that Empowerment Works:
Impact on Self-Esteem

A major concluding finding of this study is the youths' testimony about the significant positive impact upon their self-esteem resulting from participation in the youth empowerment groups. All of the participants state that the program they were in affected their lives in meaningful ways.

The teens were convinced of the program's effectiveness when the empowerment process helped them to increase their self-esteem. For instance, Susan now values herself as an important person.

I have very high self-esteem now about myself. Much more than I ever had before. I feel, I mean, although, I have ups and downs like everyone else does, and I still think I could lose weight or I could do this or that, I feel like I'm worth it. I'm worth being able to talk to. I'm a human being. I have my own ideas. If I want to put my ideas out, I will put them out and nobody is going to stop me because I am worth it. 'Cause my ideas are worth telling.

Similarly, Theresa can describe herself positively now.

I am a caring, sensitive, compassionate person who has made or tried to make everything that has gone negatively in my life turn around and make it positive for others.

Juan reflects on a new found maturity that comes from his being a member of the group.

After the Youth Action Program my whole attitude just changed about things. I understood how to approach situations. 'Cause in every situation you have to approach it differently. And I just started being responsible. I started getting my work in on time. I started participating in class. I respect the teachers. I didn't talk while others were talking and didn't disrespect the teachers.

But most importantly for Juan, his increased self-esteem helps him to move from special education into mainstream education.

Madeline is able to recognize her shortcomings now and wants to be recognized as a powerful young person.

I still have some of my shortcomings. I still feel that there are things about myself I could work on, but I'm not ashamed about my height, even though now I wish that I was taller. I always smile alot. I want to make my mark to be that person who people remember. I want people to remember me; before, I never thought that. I just wanted a hole to crawl in. Now I have completely crawled out of the hole and I want people to notice me because of the things I want to do and the person I want to be.

A greater self-esteem gave the participants a sense of pride and of self acceptance, as well as improving communication skills, and other dimensions of personal growth.

Juan expresses how he became a better communicator.

I carry it with me into the real world and I started to communicate with people better...I tell you after a year in the program I have become open with myself, with my father, with my friends, with the people at Youth Action Program. Just by telling someone the person might not believe it. They have to see it to believe it. The program changed me around.

Madeline changed from a young woman who couldn't look into people's eyes to a more confident communicator.

It really changed me--I can talk to my peers one on one. I could start looking people in their eyes; that was the biggest part before I couldn't let my eyes meet someone else's. After I got in the group it felt weird not to look in someone's eyes. If they didn't then I would say, Is there a problem?

Chris has gained an ambition to get ahead in life.

I see myself wanting to stride more to be at the top or successful. That's what it has given me more inspiration to be successful in whatever I want to do.

Madeline has built a deep sense of pride and respect for herself, and hopes that her friends learn from her example.

I'm a lot more proud of myself. I don't let people push me around anymore. I won't let people take advantage of me, I don't put up with other peoples' junk. I tell my friends and people in general you can't be around me unless you respect me. I hope my friends can learn from my wanting respect.

Juan talks about getting the respect, discipline and confidence that were lacking in his life.

Yeah, I got the discipline, I got the respect, I got the confidence, I got the self-esteem from the Youth Action Program. It's the power and belief that I had something to say. And to structure it not in a negative way.

I like feel very powerful and I feel very liked (Carol).

Yeah, once I think about [the program] I get this sort of glow. And a lot of people can't say they can do this, and some of them are older than me. I feel blessed (Chris).

I just want to say that the program works.
I'm an example of the program working as other
people are (Juan).

* * *

Recalling the youths' earlier, pre-program hardships and the impact of adultism on their lives, we can see how their participation in the youth groups has empowered them and thereby increased their self-esteem. One measure of the youths increased self-esteem is their ability for self-reflection: to see who they are, where they have come from and where they are going. The teens own words describe the immense change that has take place for them. Increased self esteem grows from the positive experience of shared power. This healthy foundation makes possible constructive action in their world. In Freirian terms, youth have been transformed by experiences which then permit them to act; praxis = acting and reflecting then acting again and again. Youth work to create a better world. There is clear evidence of the critical role empowerment plays in building self esteem--something not discussed in the youth empowerment literature.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

Summary

The intent of the present study was to explore directly from the statements of youth themselves how teens experience youth empowerment through participation in youth groups. Youth empowerment organizations believe that youth are disempowered in our society and have created programs which contradict society's negative attitudes and beliefs about youth. Through the personal accounts of a sample of eight youths who belong to six diverse organizations, a deeper understanding has been developed of what are essential ingredients for the empowerment of youth.

This study was not based on a random sampling. Therefore only limited generalizations can be made. It has taken but one approach to analyzing and interpreting the commonalities identified in the experiences of the youth interviewed. The following is the summary of my interpretations of the interview data. Other approaches are possible, and readers are encouraged to develop their own interpretation.

1. It was immediately evident from the data that a discussion of youth empowerment must acknowledge the oppression of adultism. The data supported the conclusions of Clark, (1975); Jackins, (1973); Miller, (1984); and Rice, (1987) whose radical theories assert the

psychological oppression of youth by adults. The youth in this study clearly expressed the negative impact of adultism on their self-esteem.

2. For the youth in this study, the first critical step towards youth empowerment was getting involved in a youth group. Youth first came to the groups for a variety of reasons. However, once the initial contact had been made, whether or not youth continued their involvement depended on their first impressions of the group. This contact provided them their first experience of the group's norms of respect for individuals and for what each has to offer. If they felt genuinely welcomed, appreciated, and met in a sensitive caring way, then they felt it was safe and rewarding to join the group and to express their feelings and ideas. This leads to the experience of mutual respect and cooperation that energized the group.

3. The adult leader was identified by youth as a crucial factor in their self empowerment. The youth interviewed emphatically concur and emphasize that the adult leader must be non-authoritarian, offer unconditional acceptance and to be trustworthy, caring and willing to follow through on personal commitment to each other and be willing to share power and information. To effectively share power adults must act out of the belief that the source of power is in the youth themselves.

4. The experience and exercise of one's own and collective power was described as a important factor in developing personal potential. While the literature (Kielsmeir, 1988; NCRY, 1982) discusses youth leadership, it does not refer to the concept of power

and its role in liberation. The effective youth empowerment organization embodied non-oppressive models of power sharing. Positive consequences for the youth included the assumption of significant responsibilities, increased confidence, self-esteem, and ability to take action effectively and responsibly.

5. Innovative education and training provided skills, critical analysis and information, giving youth tools which increased their abilities to express their power in the world. Empowerment was a result of their accomplishments in roles otherwise believed to be beyond their potential.

6. The youth repeatedly emphasized the importance of a safety, closeness, and appreciation in the groups to help foster empowerment. In a safe environment, teens share feeling, thoughts, and ideas openly and honestly; trust and friendship grow. Youth felt safe from ridicule and shame; safe to express feelings, thoughts, and hopes. To grow close to others and to give and receive appreciation for who they are.

7. In the context of a safe, structured environment the youth studied, developed, and practiced skills in self expression and conflict resolution, with a positive impact on their self esteem. The literature only makes reference to the importance of young people expressing opinions, leaving out the significance of healthy sharing of emotions and appropriate responses to conflict, shown by this study to be critical in the empowerment process for youth.

8. For the youth in this study, acceptance of diversity underlies empowerment. When teens felt accepted and valued in their

uniqueness, they were able to extend the same acceptance to others. Youth identify this appreciation of diversity as an important concept, one not referred to in the literature.

9. As a direct result of the development of a personal voice, youths in this study felt able to express their personal convictions, take action and make a difference in communities. A key aspect of empowerment, neglected by the literature, is having something to say, the authority to say it, and being listened to.

10. Teens interviewed referred to a process of transformation from being largely apolitical to being involved in collective social change efforts in their communities. One of the most striking findings was the level of the political sophistication developed in youth as they learned to take effective actions in the complex politics of their communities. NCRY, (1982) supports the need for youth to take action. The present study goes further to assert the importance for youth to develop critical analysis and work on issues of their choice.

11. Key to the success of an organization in empowering youth was its underlying philosophical assumptions. An understanding of human needs; to establish identity, to be in relationships with others, to do service and respect and be respected and collaboration with others must inform the philosophical assumptions. Beliefs that, for example, youth can exercise power, develop a voice, express opinions and take action are expressed throughout the effective youth empowerment organization.

12. For the youth in this study, organizational structures provide a framework within which teens come together personally, culturally and for regular activities. The organizational structure provides a framework that expressed the philosophical assumptions and provided opportunity for the youth to take action in which they experience their power and enhanced self esteem. A most distinctive feature of the organizational structure was its commitment to power-with rather than power over (Kreisberg, 1986). This enables the youth to effect the very structure of the organization reshaping it according to their judgment and intention.

13. The teens interviewed articulated their perceptions of the empowerment process. They are expert in naming their needs and what they want from others, to develop their powers to analyze, understand and act. In the youth empowerment organization, the youth defined and determined their own process. Such input is not recognized in the field of youth empowerment.

14. In the youths' own testimony, the most important outcome of their empowerment was the increase in their self esteem. For the youth in this study, this increase is seen in their ability for self-reflection, to see who they are, to belong, to know where they have come from and where they're going, and also in the positive changes that they have made in their lives. The direct relationship between empowerment and increased self esteem is not discussed in the literature.

Conclusions

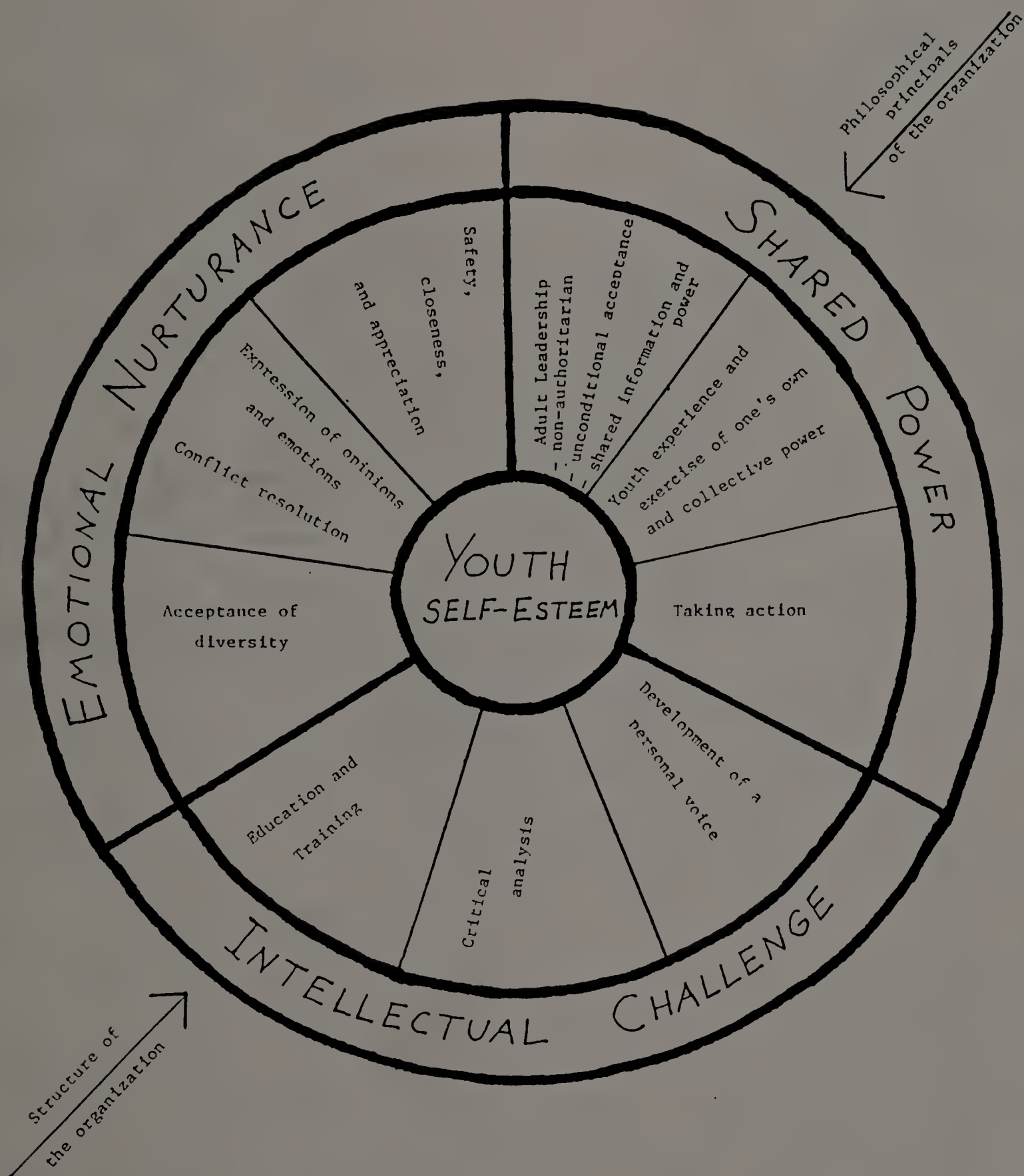
This study presents a number of themes integral to youth empowerment which were identified by youth in interviews. In the course of the interviews, teens conducted themselves in a manner which corroborated the data--they spoke with deep conviction, their manner projected confidence and mutual respect, and they met the researcher as an equal. Maria took a break from organizing a rally protesting budget cuts in youth services. Juan and Chris interrupted their work on national legislation affecting youth in order to be interviewed. Madeline warmly welcomed the researcher to the youth center and openly and easily shared her personal story with an adult stranger. Their words were their own. It was clear to this researcher that they were, from their personal experience, experts on youth empowerment.

The use of a qualitative research method was crucial in order to obtain such information on personal growth and change. In retrospect, the methodology used was consistent with the empowerment process. Youths were respected, listened to, treated as equals, and acknowledged as experts. The process encouraged them to be reflective and to enter into a dialogue. It enabled them to make their stories more public.

This research emphasizes the importance of a number of previously unidentified concepts to the field of youth empowerment. Many of the themes identified and discussed in this study have been explored in the context of work with youth. By using the specific lens of youth empowerment, however, the study suggests how an

organization can create a matrix in which youth experience increased self-esteem and empowerment. A number of the elements identified in this study have not been explored in the youth empowerment literature.

The researcher suggests grouping these elements under three headings. The empowerment organization provides emotional nurturance, consisting of safety, closeness and appreciation, the welcomed expression of emotions and opinions, conflict resolution and the acceptance of diversity. Such emotional nurturance lays a strong foundation and creates a positive synergistic community climate in the organization. In this climate, intellectual challenge is developed; youth receive sophisticated training and education which builds critical analysis and fosters the development of their voice. Through this combination of intellectual and emotional growth, many aspects, qualities and capacities of the youth developed individually and as members of a group. Set in a context of shared power--with an adult leader who is non-authoritarian; where youths' experience and exercise of power is facilitated; where youth choose where and how to take action--self esteem and empowerment thrive (see Figure 6.1, p. 155).



By: Ange DiBenedetto

Figure 6.1 Youth Empowerment Model

The research indicates that incorporating these three areas in a youth empowerment model--emotional nurturance, intellectual challenge, shared power with adults--results in a successful formula for the transformation from disempowerment to empowerment. Clearly, all three are critical, complementing each other to create a whole.

This transformation for youth must depend upon change in how we define the problems of youth. The study is based upon such a change. Its underlying premise is that youth are indeed oppressed. To successfully advocate for youth, we must work to end that oppression. Youth empowerment programs that include the elements discussed increase self esteem and empowerment and enable youth to work to end their oppression.

The youth interviewed in this study came from a wide variety of ethnic, racial, and class backgrounds. The success of the empowerment process across this diverse although small sample of youth suggests the potential for broad effectiveness. Juan--Hispanic, poor, inner city, raised by a grandmother; Carol--White, middle class, suburban, divorced parents; Madeline--Black, upper middle class, mid-western, nuclear family--despite the differences among these youth, all recount the positive impact the empowerment group has had on them. From this finding the researcher concludes that this empowerment process can be used in a wide range of settings with healthy growthful outcomes.

For the youth in this study, the youth empowerment group provided an intervention in lives that had been characterized as severely and chronically "troubled." The transformative process of

empowerment turned their lives towards positive change and away from the destructive beliefs and behaviors. It is clear that the youth empowerment groups offered a tool for successfully reaching youth in need. Given this function as a curative intervention, one can only hypothesize the potential power of empowerment programs as a preventive model for youth.

The study revealed the significant role of power dynamics--shared power with adults and the experience and exercise of power--for the youth. In hierarchical organizations power is usually hidden, neither discussed, analyzed nor shared by members. The youth groups challenged this societal norm in their open, honest assessment of power dynamics and in creating organizations where youth truly experience shared power with adults and each other. Power was redefined--no longer a concealed weapon to be used to dominate youth, it became a constructive force of liberation. Youth were infused with this energy which changed them and changed their world.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study was small and time limited. Additional research is indicated on the long term effect of these empowerment groups on the youth's self-esteem. Is increased self-esteem contingent upon group membership or is the change permanently established? Does it persist for these youth into adulthood?

Further research could explore the attributes of youth empowerment group directors. What are the sources of their inspiration, vision, motivation? Where do they derive the strength

to work with youth? How do they avoid perpetrating adultism? This dissertation did not conduct an in-depth analysis of one specific youth empowerment group. Additional research could assess all the organizational attributes of one program. How do these attributes interact and interconnect? Which variables are most important? Which variables are least important?

Research could further explore the application of an empowerment model in a school-based program. How does youth empowerment challenge the institutionalization of power in schools? What changes would occur for established institutions?

Research has explored the role of teacher empowerment (Kreisberg, 1986). What are implications of approaching empowerment from the combined perspectives of youth and teachers?

There are a number of questions which invite more exploration. Psychological testing is heavily relied upon in work with youth. Are our traditional psychological testing instruments and attitudes capable of either accurately assuring what really disturbs these "adolescents" or discerning the inner resources that came forth so richly and powerfully in empowerment programs. What implications does empowerment and oppression theory have for such testing? How would a model of youth empowerment affect counseling and family therapy? What changes are indicated in social institutions--Department of Youth Services, Department of Social Services, law and public policy, the workplace, etc.--by a belief in youth oppression and empowerment?

By introducing the concepts of oppression and empowerment into the field of youth studies, this dissertation raises a number of questions that challenge the prevalent assumptions about youth culture and models of intervention.

Implications

This dissertation outlines the impact of the empowerment process upon youth themselves, their communities, as well as upon youths' future in the workplace. There are clear implications for youth in their communities. A chain reaction can take place in which youth, motivated by the empowerment process, can bring new ideas, a critical consciousness and healthier, more open ways of communication to their friends and families. Each youth group incorporated a component of social action in the local community. Youth were leaders in organizing anti-drug and pro-choice campaigns, participated in community development and developed congressional legislation on youth issues. Youth played powerful roles in influencing and involving other youth and adults alike.

This study yields important lessons for professionals working with youth. Counselors, teachers, youth group leaders, corrections officers--all could incorporate the elements discussed in Chapter V in their interactions with youth. If more teachers avoided the automatic application of negative stereotypes and instead used a model of empowerment, surely they would increase their success in educating youth. By treating youth as equals, by sharing power with youth in a more collaborative relationship, teachers could guide

youth to acquire new skills and to learn to take positive action towards building their future. Powerlessness is the root cause of violence. All the acceptance, appreciation, skills, training and opportunities to develop power and learn to use it responsibly are the most effective means of eliminating violence in our communities, homes, and world. If youth professionals transformed their power dynamics in their relationships with youth, they could share the success shown by the youth empowerment groups. There are further implications of this study that will be seen as youth, impacted by the empowerment process, enter the workplace. The literature in the field of Organizational Development substantiates trends towards greater participation by workers in workplace management and towards a greater need for workers who are accepting of diversity. Empowered youth bring skills readily applicable in this context. They are open-minded, confident, articulate, and have developed skills in decision-making and problem solving. They are well prepared for leaderships in the workplace.

The study indicates the powerful potential of youth empowerment programs for youth, their communities and their future. The essential elements are clear. How can they be widely implemented? How can this knowledge be replicated in the mainstream, to offer all youth an empowered future?

A P P E N D I C E S

APPENDIX A

WRITTEN CONSENT FORM--YOUTH PARTICIPANT

I agree to participate in a study about youth empowerment conducted by Ange DiBenedetto, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. I understand that the objective of this study is to provide information about my participation in a youth empowerment group. The University of Massachusetts requires that people who participate in any research must first give written "informed consent."

I understand that the information generated from my participation in this study will be used primarily for doctoral research but may also be used in presentation for graduate school classes, professional conferences, and written publications. Confidentiality will be maintained. In all written materials and oral presentations, pseudonyms will be substituted for the names of persons. This study will give youth the opportunity to contribute to the research on youth oppression and empowerment. One disadvantage of participation in this type of study is that individuals will not be acknowledged by name for their contributions.

I will participate in one 60-90 minute in-depth interview and a follow-up session. I also understand that I can withdraw consent at anytime with no consequences. The interview will be audio-taped and a transcript will be made. I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue participation in this project at any time.

In signing this form I am assuring you that I will make no financial claims on you for the use of the material in my interview. Although there is no risk of physical, emotional, or mental injury from participating in this interview, the University guidelines specify that no medical treatment will be given by the University of Massachusetts should any physical injury result from participating in this project.

I, _____, have read this statement carefully and thoroughly and agree to participate as an interviewee under all the conditions stated above.

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

DATE

SIGNATURE OF INTERVIEWER

APPENDIX B

WRITTEN CONSENT FORM--LEGAL GUARDIAN

As a legal guardian I give my permission for _____, to participate in a study about youth empowerment conducted by Ange DiBenedetto, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. I understand that the objective of this study is to provide information about his/her participation in a youth empowerment group. The University of Massachusetts requires that the minors participating in any research must have the written "informed consent" of their legal guardian.

I understand that the information generated in this study will be used primarily for doctoral research but may also be used in presentation for graduate school classes, professional conferences, and written publications. Confidentiality will be maintained. In all written materials and oral presentations, pseudonyms will be substituted for the names of persons. This study will give youth the opportunity to contribute to the research on youth oppression and empowerment. One disadvantage of participation in this type of study is that individuals will not be acknowledged by name for their contributions.

I understand that the participant will be interviewed for one 60-90 minute in-depth interview. I also understand that the participants' can withdraw consent at anytime with no consequences. I give my permission to have the session audio taped. Transcripts of the interview will be made and will be mailed to participants to allow them to make any corrections or changes on the written document.

In signing this form I am assuring you that I will make no financial claims on you for the use of the material gathered from the interview. Although there is no risk of physical, emotional, or mental injury from participating in this interview, the University guidelines specify that no medical treatment will be given by the University of Massachusetts should any physical injury results from participating in the this project.

I, _____, have read this statement carefully and thoroughly and give my permission to allow _____, to participate as an interviewee under all the conditions stated above.

SIGNATURE OF LEGAL GUARDIAN

DATE

SIGNATURE OF INTERVIEWER

APPENDIX C

BACKGROUND INFORMATION OF PARTICIPANT

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____

Age: _____

Educational background: _____

Ethnic/Racial background: _____

Family background: _____

Income: _____

Siblings: _____

Divorced _____ Married _____ Single Parent _____

Other _____

Name of the Organization: _____

Name of the Director: _____

Number of years in the organization: _____

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS GUIDELINES

A. Background information on: Past relations to self, adults, peers and society:

Self:

What's it been like growing up?

Were there any important experiences that have shaped your life?

How did you feel about yourself and why?

How did you act towards yourself?

What did you think of yourself?

Adults:

What were your relationships with your--parents, teachers, employers like (adult and authority)?

How did you feel about adults?

How did you act with adults?

What do you think of adults?

Peers:

What was your relationship with kids your own age?

How did you feel about your peers?

How did you act towards your peers?

What did you think of your peers?

Society:

How did you see yourself in the world?

When you thought about society, what did you think?

What opinions did you have?

Did you act on your opinions or feelings?

What did you feel about your place in or contributions to society?

What did you think of society?

B. Information about getting involved in youth empowerment group:

Why did you get involved in the organization?

What attracted you to the group?

Why did you join while others didn't?

What was the first meeting like?

Why did you come back?

What did it feel like?

How have you changed as a result of the group?

How long have you belonged?

What positions have you held in the group (leadership, etc.)?

Briefly, how is the group structured, process, attitude, etc.?

C. Present relationship to self, adults, peers, and society after belonging to youth empowerment group?

Self:

What has your experience in the group been like?
 Has it changed the way you feel about yourself?
 Can you describe one experience in the group that has really effected you or has had an impact on your life?
 How did you feel about yourself now?
 What do you like best about this group?
 What frustrates you?
 How do you act toward yourself?
 Have you personally changed since you have been in the group?
 What was it that helped you to change?
 Can you give me an example?
 How did you use the resources of the group?
 What enabled you to see the big picture of oppression as it pertains to other people?

Adults:

What's your relationship to the adults in the group?
 How do you feel about them?
 Who are the leaders?
 What role do the leaders play?
 What do they do?
 How do they act towards the rest of the group?
 How do you act with adults?
 What do you think of adults?

Peers:

How do you feel about your peers?
 Are there any changes in your feelings?
 What's your relationship to your peers in this group?
 Is it the same or different from other relationships you have with kids your own age?
 How do you act or treat each other?

Society:

What is your view of the world now?
 Have your opinions changed?
 Have you acted on your opinions?
 What do you feel about your potential contribution to society?
 What do you see as your role or place in the world?

D. Information about Youth Empowerment Group:

What makes this group special?

Are some people more powerful in the group than others?

Can you talk about how you make decisions in the group?

Is there anything about the group structure that stands out for you?

Have you experienced anything negative in the group?

What haven't I asked you about that I should?

You look back on all that you said, how would you summarize it?

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